

**Ruth Paine's work with ProNica in Nicaragua
and
accusations from JFK assassination conspiracy believers
without substance:**

A case study

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The film of Max Good, *The Assassination & Mrs. Paine* (2022), contains the following relating to Nicaragua allegations against Ruth Paine.

DiEugenio: Later on in her life Ruth Paine goes on down to Nicaragua, and there are reports of her going to Sandinista sympathizers' meetings and taking notations of what went down. For many, many people, the veneer has come off Ruth and Michael Paine. I mean they are just not credible any more.

Anonymous man (image scrambled and voice altered): I knew a woman who in the early 1990s who worked with Ruth Paine as a Christian peace activist in Nicaragua. This was during the time of the civil war in Nicaragua during the Reagan and Bush I years.

Sue Wheaton: It was a contentious time down there. It was very clear that the CIA was supporting the so-called "Contra" freedom fighters all the way. The Contras were the ones opposing the Sandinistas revolution.

Anonymous man: The Christian group that this woman and Ruth were involved with was called ProNica. And they were helping the poorest people of Nicaragua who naturally sided with the Sandinistas. Because of this, these

Christian peace groups were often heavily monitored by our U.S. intelligence agencies.

Ruth Paine: My work in Nicaragua was with a Quaker organization. We had a project to help the poorest of the poor in Nicaragua. And at one of these meetings a woman showed up and proceeded to accuse me of a lot of things.

Wheaton: She introduced herself as Ruth Paine representing the Quakers. And I said well you're not that Quaker Ruth Paine who knew Marina Oswald are you?

Anonymous man: This woman told me that after Sue Wheaton had told people about Ruth's association with the assassination, which they did not know about, then they became even more suspicious of her. She and others in their organization believed that Ruth was a CIA agent or asset who was down there for the purpose of gathering information about the group.

Wheaton: So Ruth had a photographer that comes and was with her. He was there snapping everybody. And that's when they said well we're doing the article for the Nicaragua Network. But Nicaragua Network had never heard of such a story. They were taking their pictures at a meeting, and we tried to take their picture and they left.

After retirement from a career in a public school system, starting in 1990 Ruth Paine served a number of years as the director of ProNica, carried out by Southeastern Yearly Meeting of Friends (Quakers). ProNica was begun in 1985 by members of the St. Petersburg, Florida, Friends Meeting to help the poorest and hardest-hit people of war-torn Nicaragua. This was at a time when U.S.-backed Contras were at war attempting to overthrow the Sandinista government with horrible effects on the people of that country.

In 1990 the Sandinistas, who had come to power in the Revolution of 1979, lost power in an election to the U.S.-backed Violeta Chamorro, which ended the war.

Ruth Paine's position with ProNica began just after the Contra war had ended and the inauguration of Violeta Chamorro.

The people of Nicaragua were in dire straits. Ruth's first trip to Nicaragua was three weeks in July-Aug 1990, with no known incident or controversy concerning her visit

at that time. The allegations were made during a second visit to Nicaragua in Feb-March 1991.

Under Ruth Paine's direction over the next twelve years, 1990-2002, ProNica became better organized and flourished, with an outreach developed to hundreds of Friends meetings, churches and peace organizations building a strong financial donor base. To my knowledge there has never been either government money or a foundation grant involved in the funding of ProNica at any point. ProNica did not run programs itself but chose projects indigenous to Nicaraguans to fund—and organized visits of groups of students and other interested persons to live in homes of poor people in Nicaragua.

In 2002 ProNica became incorporated as an independent nonprofit, no longer a project of Southeastern Yearly Meeting carried out by a committee of the Yearly Meeting, the leading member of that committee being Ruth Paine. But it still involved the same people, programs, and Friends' support including Ruth. The ProNica logo read: "ProNica: Quakers in solidarity with Nicaraguans since 1985". In 2006 Ruth moved to Sebastopol, California to be near her son Chris. ProNica continued its work in Nicaragua for another sixteen years until ProNica ended in 2022. From the beginning, the stateside national office of ProNica was on the property of the St. Petersburg Friends meetinghouse.

I was a regular attender of the St. Petersburg Friends Meeting in the early 2000s (late 2000 to late 2002), and I knew Ruth Paine. The St. Petersburg Friends Meeting, part of Southeastern Yearly Meeting, has a long history of engagement in controversial social and civil rights issues in keeping with Friends concerns. I know firsthand that Meeting and the people there were for real. Ruth Paine was well-regarded in the St. Petersburg meeting. If anything substantive had come to light in support of the allegations or suspicions raised against Ruth Paine starting in 1991, I do not believe the St. Petersburg Friends Meeting and Southeastern Yearly Meeting would have supported Ruth Paine as ProNica's director for so many years, renewed annually by unanimous sense of the meeting in the Quaker manner of doing business.

Sandinistas

While Friends are pacifist and noncombatant and have a long history of humanitarian assistance to civilians on both sides of armed conflicts, the sentiments of the Friends of the St. Petersburg Meeting, the other monthly meetings of Southeastern Yearly Meeting, and every Friends meeting in North America which practiced unprogrammed worship on the basis of silence that I have ever visited or known,

were opposed to U.S. support for the Contras and Contra activities in the war. This opposition to what the U.S. was doing with the Contras was so deep-seated and pervasive that I cannot remember a single voice to the contrary on this point in the St. Petersburg meeting or any other Friends meeting.

And no wonder. The U.S.-backed Contras in Nicaragua were considered among the worst human rights violators in Latin America in reports year after year (https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Contras#cite_note-94). Such as:

Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 1984: “The CIA directed [Contra] forces are among the worst human rights violators in Latin America, responsible for systematic brutality against a civilian population. For its critical role in facilitating the Contra violence, the [United States] Administration must share responsibility as a hemispheric violator of human rights. The Contras have killed, tortured, raped, mutilated and abducted hundreds of civilians they suspect of sympathizing with the Sandinistas. Victims have included peasants, teachers, doctors and agricultural workers.”

Former Contra leader Edgar Chamorro, affidavit to the International Court of Justice, 1985: “The CIA did not discourage such tactics. To the contrary, the Agency severely criticized me when I admitted to the press that the FDN had regularly kidnapped and executed agrarian reform workers and civilians. We were told that the only way to defeat the Sandinistas was to...kill, kidnap, rob and torture...” (<http://www.williamgbecker.com/chamorroaffidavit.pdf>)

Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1987: “The record of the contras in the field, as opposed to their official professions of democratic faith, is one of consistent and bloody abuse of human rights, of murder, torture, mutilation, rape, arson, destruction and kidnapping.”

Human Rights Watch, 1989: “[The] contras were major and systematic violators of the most basic standards of the laws of armed conflict, including by launching indiscriminate attacks on civilians, selectively murdering non-combatants, and mistreating prisoners.”

I cannot count the times I saw Friends slowly rise out of the silence, in First-Day meetings for worship, and speak of being overwhelmed with grief over what was being done in our name by our government, wreaking havoc and destruction in Central America such as Nicaragua. The Sandinista government was viewed sympathetically for what had been accomplished in literacy and health care. ProNica

was regarded by grassroots Friends, and the various monthly meetings and yearly meetings across North America who allocated financial support to ProNica in their budgets, as attempting to work with the poorest of Nicaragua to undo some of the damage done by U.S. policy. That was the context in which Ruth Paine, part of the St. Petersburg meeting, began her position as director of ProNica as the era of the Contra wars ended, and what remained was a society in shambles and deep poverty.

A cruel epistemological circularity

The suspicions Ruth Paine experienced in Nicaragua referred to in the 2022 film, *The Assassination & Mrs. Paine*, reflect a cruel epistemological circularity in which prior claims and suspicions of JFK assassination conspiracy researchers directly originated and caused those suspicions of Ruth when she arrived in Managua, Nicaragua, in 1991 for her second time as director of ProNica. In circular reasoning, the suspicions in Nicaragua, arising from some JFK assassination conspiracy writings about Ruth, are claimed as confirmation that the suspicions of her role in the JFK assassination are true. The suspicions at each end are cited as evidence for the truth of the suspicions at the other end.

The primary source documents for the allegations against Ruth Paine in Nicaragua are two texts written close to the time of the events by Sue Wheaton, titled “Incident in February/March 1991 in Nicaragua”, dated April 20, 1991, and Addendum dated Jan 28, 1992, at http://jfkpage.com/Paine/Occurrence_in_Nicaragua.pdf.

Sue Wheaton was in Nicaragua as part of ecumenical church work, not herself a Friend. On Feb 5, 1991, Ruth Paine attended a meeting of the governing council of the Ben Linder House in Managua soon after her arrival. Jon Roise, director of Friends work in Nicaragua which included being resident director of a Friends hospitality house, El Centro de Los Amigos (Friends Center) in Managua, and responsible for carrying out ProNica’s work on the ground in Nicaragua, was a member of the Ben Linder House Council. Ruth, not a member of the Council, accompanied Jon and participated in the meeting as a guest.

Sue Wheaton recognized Ruth Paine’s name from having read some books about the JFK assassination which suspected Ruth of having been a CIA spy involved in the assassination of President Kennedy.

It is important to note that there has never been any evidence Ruth worked for the CIA in the form of a document, credible witness, or confession, and Ruth certainly had nothing whatsoever to do with participation in the assassination of President

Kennedy. Ruth voted for, supported, and mourned the loss of President Kennedy when the assassination happened on November 22, 1963, at a time when Marina Oswald was living in her home in Irving, Texas.

But two of Ruth's immediate family members had connections to the CIA. Ruth's father, William Avery Hyde, worked setting up insurance cooperatives in Latin America through his employer, Nationwide Insurance, and then USAID, and supplied economic intelligence reports to the CIA from the countries in which he worked (<https://ratical.org/ratville/JFK/FalseMystery/WmAveryHyde-B.LaMonica.pdf>), and it was reported that a confidante of Ruth had reported that Ruth told her her father had been an "executive agent" for the CIA in his international insurance-cooperative work (<https://whokilledjfk.net/paine.htm>).

Meanwhile, an older sister of Ruth in Washington, D.C., starting ca. 1960 obtained overt (non-secret) employment with the CIA in Washington, D.C., as a psychologist. Ruth's sister's husband, Ruth's brother-in-law, a sort of maverick hippie inventor type, applied twice to work for the CIA; it is not clear if he was accepted.

On Ruth's husband's side, Michael Paine, two cousins of Michael, Thomas Dudley Cabot and John Cabot, were leading figures in the United Fruit Company which had CIA connections, though there is no information Ruth knew those two Cabots personally.

And Ruth's mother-in-law's (Michael's mother's) longtime best friend, Anne Bancroft, became the mistress of Allen Dulles, CIA chief from 1953 to 1961, though Ruth never met either Bancroft or Dulles (that is, prior to Ruth's 1964 testimony before the Warren Commission of which Dulles was a member).

Of course, just because family members were employed with the CIA does not mean Ruth was CIA. Ruth had another sibling, a brother, who was a physician in Ohio, and there is no indication he was CIA. In fact, apart from one trip to England in 1952 at age 19 to attend a Young Friends conference, Ruth appears not to have travelled outside the United States for several more decades, whereas the CIA typically involves itself with persons who travel in foreign countries of CIA's interest. My father was in the U.S. Army Air Force, and I have a sister-in-law who is retired career U.S. Air Force. It does not follow that I am U.S. Air Force (I am not), simply because family members or in-laws to me are. Same analogy.

Ruth has been criticized for denying she knew of her older sister's CIA employment. To some JFK conspiracy believers this was proof Ruth had to be lying, because how

could someone not know that about an older sister. Ruth and her older sister were quite a few years apart in age and it is not obvious how close they were in adult life, and they lived in different parts of the country. On Quora someone asked how much family members of CIA employees typically know about the family member's CIA employment. A comment in response is identified as from Brian Scott Gregory, Public Affairs Officer at the National Security Agency (referring to overt employment):

“Typically, with both the CIA and NSA, there's no express requirement you don't tell people who you work for. The only real requirement is—you can't discuss anything that's classified, which is basically 99% of what you do, so when you get hired on—you're advised not to discuss who you work for and to use a cover job just to keep the conversations easier to mentally compartmentalize.

“With that said, it's not unusual for a CIA agent to simply say ‘I work for the State Department’, which to most sounds like a boring desk job (which it typically is anyways)—and works very well for mitigating further inquiry.

“As to your question. ‘What happens if the family of a CIA agent found out what he or she does?’ Typically it's no big deal. I actually ‘came out’ with my family after lying to them about who I worked for in 2011, they didn't understand why I was traveling around the world so much for work and the nature of what I worked with had me discussing concepts in a way that made them think I was on drugs.

“My brother's response was priceless when I told him. ‘I F***ING KNEW IT!’, he yelled, ‘I told mom there's got to be some other reason you're going to these places that you're not telling us. I bet he's a spook’, to which my mom denied, she bought my cover story.

“So being sincere. The deception within your family and circle of friends is actually much tougher to deal with than the agency (NSA and CIA have the same policies). There's resentment you'll deal with, accusations of manipulation and lying, and an overall challenging of everything you say for the next few years that follow. It got easier for me after 5 years, but trust me when I say—I'd rather them know who I work for and simply not discuss what I do rather than lie about it entirely nowadays. One way or another though, as long as you're not disclosing anything classified, the agency just doesn't care, your [overt] employment at an agency like the NSA or CIA doesn't require

deception of that employment there.” (<https://www.quora.com/What-happens-if-the-family-of-a-CIA-agent-found-out-what-he-or-she-does-1>)

(I thank Robert Reynolds, who runs a website concerning classified document releases related to the JFK assassination [<http://jfkarc.info>], for clarifying to me the detail and significance that Ruth’s sister’s CIA employment in D.C. was overt—that is how Ruth’s sister’s CIA employment could end up published in a 1961 Falls City, Virginia city directory listing compiled from public domain sources and door-to-door canvassing—even though that employment was not necessarily told to everyone including family members.)

The earlier-mentioned friend in whom Ruth confided revealed this reflection of Ruth concerning her father whom Ruth obviously cared for:

“‘The friend mentioned to me that Ruth had admitted to her that her father had worked for the CIA,’ [JFK researcher Steve] Jones stated. Ruth told her friend that in his capacity as a businessman, and later a government employee with AID, ‘he routinely collected intelligence information and reported it to the CIA. So, in other words, he was an asset—a businessman who was an asset to the CIA, not a direct employee.’ Ruth added that her father never would have done so if he had understood the CIA’s true objective of destabilizing a third world country so that American corporations could control its economy.” (<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=217861#relPageId=50>)

Ruth has always denied she was CIA, and there never has been any evidence Ruth was CIA. But to many JFK conspiracy believers, Ruth’s denials mean nothing. They are certain her family members’ CIA links mean Ruth too is CIA, no matter what Ruth may say or do (<https://www.kennedysandking.com/john-f-kennedy-articles/carol-hewett-steve-jones-and-barbara-la-monica-dissect-the-paines>).

This is not to say every JFK assassination researcher who believes the assassination was carried out by a criminal conspiracy thinks Ruth Paine was CIA.

Jeffrey Meek, a former managing editor of the *Hot Springs Village Voice* of Arkansas, has published four books arguing a criminal conspiracy interpretation of the assassination (*A Lone Gunman?* [2019]; *Manipulation of Lee Harvey Oswald and the Cover-up that Followed* [2021]; *The JFK Files: Pieces of the Assassination Puzzle* [2023]; and *Buddy Walthers: A Bullet Found, a House in Town* [2024]). Meek interviewed Ruth Paine in 2020 and concluded there was no warrant for concluding Ruth was CIA:

“Although there is little doubt family members had direct CIA or CIA-related associations, I was not able to directly connect Ruth Hyde Paine to any such connection. None of the many allegations directed at Paine, in my opinion, warrant a conclusion of her being a CIA contact.” (Meek, *The Manipulation of Lee Harvey Oswald* [2021], 147)

David Talbot, founder of Salon and author of *Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years* (2007), and *The Devil's Chessboard: Allen Dulles, the CIA and the Rise of America's Secret Government* (2015):

“Ruth Paine has always scoffed at the idea that she played an intelligence role in the Oswald story. A visitor asked her point blank if she had any contact with the CIA. ‘Not that I’m aware of,’ she laughed. *This is true*, as far as it goes...” (Talbot, *The Devil's Chessboard* [2015], 43)

Max Good, producer of the 2022 film, *The Assassination & Mrs. Paine*, in the film:

“There are all kinds of claims and rumors about the Paines but no concrete evidence has ever directly linked them to the CIA.”

But now let us go back to 1991.

Ruth is accused

Sue Wheaton had read accusations about Ruth in JFK assassination conspiracy books and believed them. Ten days after recognizing Ruth Paine in the Feb 5, 1991 meeting, Sue Wheaton publicly ambushed Ruth Paine with her suspicions.

That happened on Feb 15, 1991. At a potluck discussion group at the Ben Linder House, Wheaton led a discussion on the topic of the effects of the JFK assassination on U.S. foreign policy. Ruth and the contingent from the Friends Center were present but Ruth did not know what was coming. As the discussion opened, Wheaton noted the presence of Ruth Paine as having had a personal role in some of the events of those days. Wheaton asked Ruth to tell of her relationship with Marina and Lee Oswald in 1963, which Ruth did, still unaware of what was coming. From Sue Wheaton's account:

“I introduced the topic and invited Ruth to share any perceptions she might care to about the Oswalds. She said she would share her personal knowledge and then let us pursue the designated topic. She explained that as a good

Quaker she had learned Russian to be able to communicate with ‘the enemy’. Through a circle of friends in Dallas (I am not sure whether or not she said these were Russian-speaking friends), she met the Oswalds and had compassion for Marina, who knew no English, was pregnant, whose husband was unemployed and who needed a place to live in Dallas. Ruth offered to put Marina and her child up, since the Paines also had young children. Ruth drove to New Orleans to get Marina and her child. Except for the weekend before the assassination, Oswald came to the Paine home on weekends to visit his family. He spoke good Russian. Ruth did not like Oswald much, mainly because he didn’t want Marina to learn English and seemed to want to keep her ‘barefoot and pregnant.’ Ruth found Oswald moody. She thought it was possible he had acted alone in killing Kennedy. She described how, upon learning of the assassination, she and Marina went to the garage to look for Oswald’s rifle and found it missing. She mentioned Oswald’s alleged attack on retired right-wing General Edwin Walker. She mentioned the famous picture of Oswald reading a book on Marx and holding the rifle with which he allegedly shot Kennedy. She admitted in response to a question that she had secured Oswald the job at the School Book Depository Building. She said after the assassination Oswald’s family prevented her from seeing Marina, and this had been quite painful. She described her testimony before the Warren Commission. She indicated she believed the Warren Commission conclusions.”

That is all that Wheaton tells in her original account as to what was said at that meeting—nothing of what happened *after* that above. What happened *after* that is told by the masked voice of the “Anonymous man” in *The Assassination & Mrs. Paine*. He said some things were said by Sue Wheaton concerning Ruth and the JFK assassination that spread suspicions of Ruth Paine among her community in Nicaragua. The “Anonymous Man” said:

“This woman told me that after Sue Wheaton had told people about Ruth’s association with the assassination, which they did not know about, then they became even more suspicious of her.”

Here is Ruth Paine’s account of what transpired, from her interview in the 2022 film, *The Assassination & Mrs. Paine*:

“And at one of these meetings a woman showed up and proceeded to accuse me of a lot of things.”

The “lot of things” referred to the JFK assassination. Here is Ruth telling of it in a 2014 email to a private person who showed Ruth’s email on YouTube:

“Sue Wheaton apparently read and believed a book written by Alan J. Weberman: ‘Coup D’etat in America’. She confronted me with hostile words using the false information from this book one evening when I was at a meeting with ‘ex-pats’ (U.S. citizens) in Managua.” (Email, Ruth Paine to Ted Yacucci, ca. 2014, at 2:54 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grAJBjPtp6Q>)

Author Thomas Mallon, on the basis of interviews with Ruth Paine, gave this account of what happened in his 2002 book, *Mrs. Paine’s Garage*.

“A decade ago, Sue Wheaton, an American aid worker in Central America who had been influenced by the writings of A.J. Weberman—co-author of *Coup d’Etat in America* and, for a while, operator of an enormous website devoted to conspiracy theory—blindsided Ruth with a public denunciation when the two women came together at a monthly ecumenical meeting in Nicaragua. Wheaton managed to convince three or four people Ruth worked with that Mrs. Paine was not to be trusted; they came to wonder whether Ruth’s presence in Nicaragua wasn’t really a matter of undercover intelligence activity. ‘I tend to take photographs and try to remember names,’ Ruth explains. ‘And that made them extremely nervous.’

“Ruth cites this as ‘the only place where I have felt damaged by false testimony,’ and ‘even then I could understand it, because these were folks who knew some of the terrible things that the CIA was doing in the eighties in Nicaragua.’ With visible anguish—and no self-pity—she tells the following story:

‘A woman who worked with the Witness for Peace...said they were instructed: if they can figure out which of this new delegation of people from the north who’ve come to see what’s going on is a CIA plant, leave ’em in Managua. Don’t even take that person out to the countryside. Because what they observed was that they’d introduce—it’s really so sad (here Ruth begins to cry)—the visitors to community leaders, and then a few weeks later those community leaders would be killed. And they assumed a connection. You know, there’s no way I could say to these folks, “Don’t worry.” They *worried*, and they had a reason to.’” (Mallon, *Mrs. Paine’s Garage* [2002], 160-161)

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Jon Roise and Ruth and a third person from the Friends House were present again at the next Ben Linder House Council meeting about three weeks later in March 1991. This was the occasion in particular, apparently the main and only real occasion, at which Ruth was claimed to have done something specific that was suspicious in Nicaragua. She was accused of objectionably having taken “copious notes”, which was viewed with suspicion. This was close to the day Ruth was flying back to the United States. Wheaton’s original account:

“[She] took copious notes of every name, organization and subject mentioned. She also peered over the organizational membership list in the office prior to the meeting and took notes.”

As told in the Wheaton account, when asked, Ruth said she was checking out an organization for which she was the decider for ProNica concerning whether ProNica should continue affiliation, subject to approval of Southeastern Yearly Meeting back in the States which would likely approve what Ruth recommended. Wheaton:

“At the close of the meeting, the person chairing commented on the many notes she [Ruth] had taken and pictures Sean had taken and asked Ruth if she would send us a copy of her report after she returned to the States, or share any other document she planned to prepare. **Ruth responded that her notes were simply for her report to the group back in St. Petersburg** and the purpose was to determine whether or not the Quaker project would continue as a member group of the Ben Linder Council. She said she planned to recommend that they continue, as she found the work of Casa Benjamin Linder to be of value. She said Sean was not affiliated with her program; that he was simply a guest at the Quaker hospitality house and his pictures were for the Nicaragua Network, not her organization.

“In conversation after the meeting Ruth explained that SEYM consisted of about 20 Quaker congregations in several southern states and that the work in Nicaragua was funded by about six wealthy people—presumably affiliated with SEYM. She told us goodbye and that she would be back in June. After she returned home, she wrote follow-up letters to several individuals and sent a copy of a letter which her group had mailed to solidarity organizations in the U.S.” ([http://jfkpage.com/Paine/Occurrence in Nicaragua.pdf](http://jfkpage.com/Paine/Occurrence%20in%20Nicaragua.pdf))

This point should be carefully remembered through every discussion of Ruth in Nicaragua: there never then or since has been any proof or evidence that Ruth's notetaking was for an informant purpose or for an agency of the government. In addition, as I read the account I wondered if there might also be a contributing factor of a clash between Friends' culture and non-Friends/solidarity organizations' suspicions of surveillance. I have experienced both. In Friends culture everything is documented in writing—Friends' documentation of activities are considered among the best-documented records in existence by historians—nothing is overtly hidden. There is no secrecy either in process or outcome concerning what Friends decide to do in their business meetings, including civil disobedience if so. The no-secrecy ethos is wired deep in Friends' history in the form of testimonies from the beginning against Friends holding memberships in any society based on secrets such as the Masons (Friends opposed on principle). Because of this no-secrecy ethos, there is not an atmosphere of suspicion toward spies or surveillance finding out or gathering intelligence on what Friends are really up to. (Friends would have concerns and a response if it were learned that a spy agency was seeking to influence decision-making or that an individual Friend in a committee or leadership position was a covert agent of such, a different matter.)

In contrast, in antiwar or solidarity groups in my experience often or typically there are atmospheres of suspicion and concerns about infiltrators functioning as informants on the group's activities, a different ethos than in Friends' meetings. I have seen this. I have seen how easily innocent people, especially newcomers, can be suspected and whispered about in such settings, too often wrongly so, the way suspicion in a climate of sustained justified low-level paranoia works out in practice.

Four key points

The first key point is the suspicions about the perception of Ruth Paine's notetaking in Nicaragua were, are, and always have been, suspicion alone, underlying which there never has been any actual knowledge or proof of wrongdoing.

The second key point, and this is critical, is that the overwhelming starting point and driver of the Nicaragua allegations against Ruth Paine with which Wheaton ambushed Ruth, as the Wheaton documents make absolutely crystal clear, was the JFK assassination allegations against Ruth themselves. From this starting point Ruth was *a priori* suspicious to Wheaton before Ruth stepped off the plane in Managua, no matter what Ruth could have said or done, because of Wheaton's belief that Ruth played a sinister role in the JFK assassination. In this way Ruth arrived to Managua with three strikes against her in Wheaton's eyes even if Ruth had not written down a single note.

Then when Ruth was seen taking a lot of notes, Wheaton and confidantes concluded *that settled it*, Ruth was “*a CIA agent or asset*” (as the “anonymous man” interviewed in the Max Good film, who may be the husband of Sue Wheaton, states). This became the narrative about Ruth in Managua spreading from those circles, even though there never was any evidence Ruth had ill intent or ill purpose when taking her notes.

The third important point is that there is no evidence or sound basis for assuming the student photographer who accompanied Jon Roise and Ruth was affiliated with Ruth or ProNica or that Ruth or Jon were involved in that photography. Ruth denied connection to both the photographs and the photographer at the time and there has been no evidence shown otherwise, even though the photographer accompanied Ruth and Jon. This is important, because Wheaton in the 2022 Max Good film *misrepresents* Ruth Paine in stating that *Ruth Paine said she herself was part of that photographer’s activity*. Here is Wheaton in the 2022 film:

“Ruth had a photographer that comes and was with her. He was there snapping everybody. And that’s when *they* [Ruth, Jon, and the photographer] *said* well *we’re* [Ruth, Jon, and the photographer] *doing the article for the Nicaragua Network*. But Nicaragua Network had never heard of such a story.”

But that is *not* what Wheaton’s original report read in 1991. In the original 1991 report Wheaton reports Ruth Paine said *the opposite*—that Ruth said the photographer’s activity was *not* affiliated with Ruth or Ruth’s doing. Here is Wheaton in 1991 speaking of the early March 1991 meeting at the Ben Linder House.

“*She [Ruth] said Sean was not affiliated with her program*; that he was simply a guest at the Quaker hospitality house and his pictures were for the Nicaragua Network, *not* her organization.”

Related to this but of sufficient significance to be considered a fourth point is that according to the two primary documents (Wheaton’s April 1991 and Jan 1992) there was no *original* allegation that *Ruth personally* had taken objectionable photographs, even though that later came into the narrative against Ruth Paine and is part of the narrative today told within JFK conspiracy circles.

The original allegation as concerns Ruth’s behavior in Nicaragua in 1991—that which Ruth *herself actually did* in Nicaragua that was considered suspicious—was the notetaking, according to the primary documents (the two documents of Wheaton of April 1991 and Jan 1992). As the Nicaragua allegation that Ruth was a spy was repeated in the years that followed, the note-taking became conflated with the

photography of the photographer as if Ruth had personally done or was responsible for both—both the objectionable notetaking and picture-taking.

In 1995 Wheaton repeated her allegation that Ruth had taken suspiciously too many notes and added a new detail: that at the Friends hospitality house where Ruth was staying, the El Centro de Los Amigos (Friends Center)—“Someone told me she studied the bulletin board there, copying everything on it” (*Probe*, July-Aug 1996, p. 9, citing correspondence of Wheaton of 4/24/95, <https://www.kennedysandking.com/images/pdf/probe-03-05-carol-hewett.pdf>).

The addition of this accusation surprised me for I thought, I have studied bulletin boards too. I have always thought things posted on bulletin boards were put there with intent to be read. Perhaps the criticism was that Ruth was not simply reading, but writing down information posted on that bulletin board. I have done that too, many times—mailing addresses, event information, book titles, house-sharing leads, you name it—without it having *occurred* to me that someone might take that amiss. (And I think it can fairly be said that in any U.S. Friends meeting bulletin board that would not be taken amiss. However, in some non-U.S. settings it might be. In this case it evidently was, even though it was the Friends House’s own bulletin board of her own organization that Ruth was accused of studying items posted on it too closely.)

But even here, five years later in 1995, the behavior of Ruth cited by Wheaton as suspicious remains solely the notetaking, no mention of Ruth herself taking pictures.

By 1997 that has changed. Someone anonymous in 1997, having picked up and repeated the story originated from Wheaton, now for the first known time takes the story of the photographer’s photos and attributes that activity to Ruth as if *Ruth herself* took those photographs (“and she took photographs of people for supposed purposes that were later proven to be false” [<http://whokilledjfk.net/paine.htm>]).

And in the 2022 film Wheaton now falsely claims Ruth herself said she was involved in the photographer’s pictures and article. (“*Ruth had a photographer* that comes and was with her. He was there snapping everybody. And that’s when *they* [Ruth, Jon, and the photographer] *said* well *we’re* [Ruth, Jon, and the photographer] doing the [photographer’s] article for the Nicaragua Network. But Nicaragua Network had never heard of such a story.”) Even though Wheaton in 1990 and 1991 explicitly wrote that Ruth said the opposite, *denied* involvement with the photographer’s picture-taking or project.

That is how the hearsay grew, the way accusations around Ruth Paine built up in JFK assassination-suspicion circles.

The photographer

Going back to the January 1992 “Addendum”, Sue Wheaton accused Ruth Paine of being party to a false representation concerning the student photographer’s activity.

In Wheaton’s earliest account (April 20, 1991), Wheaton reported that Ruth had said the student “was *not affiliated* with her program; that he was simply a guest at the Quaker hospitality house and *his pictures were for the Nicaragua Network, not her organization.*” In the Addendum (Jan 28, 1992), however, Wheaton reported a follow-up:

“The Nicaragua Network in Washington, D.C. told a friend of ours that they had not commissioned anyone to take pictures in Nicaragua. Thus, *the explanation given by Ruth Paine and Sean Miller as to why Sean was taking pictures of members of the U.S. community in Nicaragua was not valid.*”

Nicaragua Network in the 1990s was a U.S.-based hardline pro-Sandinista solidarity organization. Hypothetically, some agency or private intelligence-collection effort with nefarious intentions could put up some shell front organization pretending to be in sympathy with Nicaragua Network objectives, have it become listed as an affiliate or supporter of Nicaragua Network, and have a photographer hired by the shell organization obtain photographs, with the photographer being able to tell people in Nicaragua, “I’m working with Nicaragua Network”, or “I’m doing a project commissioned by an affiliate of Nicaragua Network”, meaning the front group affiliated with Nicaragua Network, something like that, if there was something amiss with that photography.

But it should not be assumed that that photographer’s activity was Ruth’s doing, or that Ruth was witting to an improper purpose of that photography, simply because that photographer was staying as a guest at the Friends House and car-pooled to meetings with Jon and Ruth.

A car-pooling or ride-share from the Friends House, where all three were staying, is how the arrival of all three in the same car seen by Sue Wheaton reads to me. There is no information that the photography of that photographer was known to Ruth to be other than what he told her. The fact that Ruth repeated what the photographer told

her means no more than that is what he told Ruth and Ruth believed it. It does not mean Ruth was saying something she knew was not true.

My encounter with an Australian Senator at the Auckland Friends Center, Auckland, New Zealand

I wish to press and emphasize the force of the last point above. For I have been in just this kind of situation myself, in a way that causes me to be much less quick to jump to the kind of conclusions that those condemning Ruth Paine hold. I have been in hostels and Friends hospitality houses in North America and Europe and New Zealand. One meets everyone in such settings, everyone has a story, one hears stories of other parts of the world, instant new friendships are struck up, people who have just met join up to go out to eateries and destinations and events, taxis and auto rides are shared. That is how it can happen that that photographer arrived with Jon Roise and Ruth to the Ben Linder House, and, in default of more specific information, how I believe it did happen—the two Friends' directors and the visiting college student newly arrived to Nicaragua on his assignment to do a photography project. They are staying at the Friends House in Managua at the same time, and it becomes only sensible that they drive to events together.

Friends meetings in major cities internationally typically have guest lodging on the property of the meetinghouse in which travelling visitors can lodge. Usually there is a live-in caretaker and it is an informal hostel-like situation. These are not normally advertised or promoted in venues aimed at the tourist market. On the other hand they are not secret or limited to use only by Friends either. They are intended to serve both travelling Friends and non-Friends and are open to anyone compatible who wishes to visit, whether *en route* when travelling or for temporary periods in place in a city. Guests are expected to do their own tidying up and housekeeping in the quarters which are often rooms in refurbished residential homes; there is no maid or hotel room service. Typically costs to guests are kept reasonable and affordable. I lived for two months in this kind of situation at the Auckland Friends Center in Mt. Eden, Auckland, New Zealand, in the last months of 1986.

Completely by accident, during the time I was there, an Australian Senator visited and stayed at the Auckland Friends Center also, just like a U.S. senator except in Australia, a charismatic principled Quaker from Perth named Jo Vallentine. Jo Vallentine had run as an insurgent candidate of a newly-formed startup minor party called the Nuclear Disarmament Party, on a single-issue anti-nuclear platform. That evening before dinner she told us the story of her election, how it had happened through a fluke in Australia's election system. One of the major-party candidates, seeing he did

not have sufficient votes to win, had thrown his support to Vallentine (who had been considered to have no chance of winning), and that gave her a surprise victory making her Senator from Western Australia in 1994. She took her seat in 1995 (<https://biography.senate.gov.au/vallentine-josephine/>).

As Senator with a national audience, Vallentine spoke intelligently and passionately on issues that mattered and, motivated by Gandhi and King and memories of a 1964 speech she heard by Robert F. Kennedy when she was an exchange student in the U.S., repeatedly did civil disobedience and was arrested a number of times for things like protesting at Pine Gap (<https://reimaginingpeace.wordpress.com/2014/10/25/jo-vallentine-peace-activist-and-pacifist-protesting-us-warship-in-fremantle-1985/>). I believe at the time she was the only Quaker in elected national office in the world.

After dinner I washed dishes one-on-one with Jo Vallentine, she washing the dishes, me drying and putting the glasses and saucers away, while having a conversation with the courageous senator for maybe thirty minutes in that informal setting.

(Yes, this was a real live Senator washing dishes in a hostel—that was the kind of person Jo Vallentine was, the real deal. I have never washed dishes with a U.S. senator.)

Jo Vallentine: “My interest in working for peace stemmed from the time I was a teenager, on a scholarship to the United States, at the end of which our group of international students was addressed by Robert Kennedy. There were over 1,700 students from 72 countries, and he asked us this question: ‘Can any of you imagine allowing your country to go to war against the country of any student in this auditorium?’ NO! was our resounding response ...”

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The next morning Jo Vallentine invited me to accompany her party on a private tour of the *Rainbow Warrior*, the Greenpeace ship which had been blown up in Auckland’s harbor by agents sent by the French government, in which a Dutch photographer had been killed (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinking_of_the_Rainbow_Warrior). The French government did this because Greenpeace and the *Rainbow Warrior* had been effective in world opinion in its nonviolent protests of French nuclear bomb tests in the South Pacific, which was strongly opposed by the islanders and everyone else in the region. The hull of the *Rainbow Warrior* where the French frogmen had blasted a huge hole had had a metal patch welded on by underwater divers to make the hull

again watertight, then the water pumped out and air in, and by that means the damaged ship was raised again in the Auckland harbor, where it remained docked. You could see it in the harbor but it was off-limits to the public. However, Jo Vallentine had been invited for a tour of the ship by the *Rainbow Warrior's* captain, and I had the good fortune to be invited by the Senator to be included in her party to that, which I did.

Here is the point: I was nothing other than who I said I was, travelling on my own from the U.S. with only good purposes and reasons, but I could have been anyone. What if I had not been who I seemed to be? But anyone meeting her party, Jo Vallentine introduced me among the others, repeating to others what I had told her I was doing in Auckland. To an outsider it could look like I was with Senator Vallentine.

I thought of that when reading Sue Wheaton's account of Jon Roise, Ruth Paine, and the photographer who carpooled from the Friends Center to events. From my experience, I do not believe Ruth was involved in that photographer's photography, in agreement with what Ruth said according to Wheaton's account.

When Ruth said that photographer was doing a project for Nicaragua Network, I believe that was Ruth repeating what that photographer told her, no different than Senator Vallentine introducing me and repeating what I had told her of who I was and what I was doing. That visiting student photographer at the Friends Center in Managua with Jon and Ruth will have had some reason or story as to why he was doing his photography. Then there is carpooling and Ruth telling others what he has told her, as to who he was and what he was doing. It does not mean Ruth was involved with his project or part of it. With respect to that photographer I see no cause to believe Ruth Paine was guilty of anything more than believing what that photographer told Jon and Ruth and carpooling, the same way I had been invited by Senator Vallentine to accompany her party to the *Rainbow Warrior* that day in Auckland in 1987, solely because I was there and she felt comfortable enough with me that she included me.

There is no reason to suppose Ruth Paine would have known there was something amiss with that photographer, if there was, or that there was some reason she should not interact or carpool with him, if there was. Ruth should not be condemned simply because she, Jon Roise, and the photographer arrived together at destinations in the same car, since they came from the same origin, the Friends Center in Managua where they were all staying.

The smearing of Ruth Paine escalates

An article by Carol Hewett, Barbara LaMonica & Steve Jones, titled “Ruth Paine: Social Activist or Contra Support Networker?”, *Probe*, July-Aug 1996, repeated the Sue Wheaton allegations and smeared Ruth in the title, suggesting Ruth Paine might be a Contra supporter (<https://www.kennedysandking.com/images/pdf/probe-03-05-carol-hewett.pdf>). A careful reading shows nothing specific in the article establishes Ruth was a supporter or sympathizer with the Contras. And the charge makes no sense, because it would go against everything all of the Friends working with and around Ruth stood for.

But this is how the smearing of Ruth Paine happened. Leading JFK assassination conspiracy proponents have done this. Others adopt and build further on the smearing. This kind of smearing of Ruth Paine gained traction and appeared in article after article, internet post after internet post, book after book (<https://www.cartoonstock.com/cartoon?searchID=CS215319>).

The authors of the Hewett et al. article wrongly claimed that Southeastern Yearly Meeting, which had oversight over ProNica, was part of the evangelical, pastoral branch of American Friends, whose congregations and pastors politically can be characterized as part of the evangelical right in America, very different from the traditional silent-meeting Friends. The authors build upon that misunderstanding in trying to set up an argument that the Friends running ProNica might politically be more sympathetic to the U.S.-backed Contras which some conservatives at the time supported. However contrary to Hewett et al., Southeastern Yearly Meeting has nothing to do with the evangelical, pastoral branch of Friends. The Friends of Southeastern Yearly Meeting and St. Petersburg monthly meeting are silent-meeting Friends, have values indistinguishable from those of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and could never be described as evangelical right, no more than AFSC would be so described. The authors also write,

“It is important to note that the Southeastern Yearly Meeting is a totally separate group from the American Friends Service Committee. Many people associate Quakers or Friends with the American Friends Service Committee, a progressive social action committee, founded by several east coast Quaker meetings.” (Hewett et al., *Probe*, July-Aug 1966)

That is another misunderstanding. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has long been independent of all Friends religious bodies in terms of legal autonomy

and control, but the *alignment* in views and initiatives between AFSC, and Southeastern Yearly Meeting and the St. Petersburg monthly meeting, is very strong.

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Ruth Paine's notetaking did not prove Ruth was doing other than her Friends-organization job. But the accusations of Wheaton, based on JFK assassination conspiracy writers *wrongly and baselessly* accusing Ruth of having played a secret, sinister role in the JFK assassination, caused Ruth Paine to be regarded with suspicion, accused, and ostracized in Nicaragua 28 years later. From the 1997 account cited earlier:

“[Ruth] was confronted [in 1991] ... but consistently and vehemently denied that she had anything to do with the CIA or any other governmental intelligence agency. Normally when an agent or asset was outed they would quietly leave in order to avoid further embarrassment. But since Ruth never admitted her guilt and refused to leave, she was instead asked to take a leave of absence. When she was taken to a R&R camp in nearby Costa Rica, she was asked to leave because they, too, suspected that she was an agent. Ruth returned to Nicaragua and finished her tour of duty and then left for the U.S.”

(<http://whokilledjfk.net/paine.htm>)

Note the wording of the above assumes Ruth's guilt no matter what she said or could have done. It is a modern parable evoking witch accusations in central Europe of bygone centuries, in which there was no way for an accused witch to prove her innocence. Every way a woman accused looked oddly or laughed nervously, every coincidence in timing in which a storm wiped out crops, was interpreted as further proof of her guilt by accusers who could “tell” just by looking at her. How could Ruth have proven her innocence to Sue Wheaton in Nicaragua in 1991? Or to JFK assassination conspiracy believers today with respect to her actions in Nicaragua? What could an innocent accused person say or do in such circumstances to convince accusers they are innocent?

The sad answer often is, nothing at all, so primal such accusations can be.

Conclusion

While the concerns regarding surveillance and infiltration among activist and solidarity groups in Nicaragua were very real, there has never been any evidence that Ruth Paine was turning names in as a spy, was CIA, or was a sympathizer of the Contras in

Nicaragua's civil war. Nor is there any evidence that, over a quarter-century earlier, Ruth was culpably involved in the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. There is no evidence for any of those things. But in a witch accusation mindset, a lack of evidence does not matter. The existence of suspicion is considered its own evidence for itself.

The most illuminating capsule summary of this sorry history of what happened in Nicaragua with Ruth Paine is the following account of Sue Wheaton in the Jan 20, 1992 Addendum to the primary source document, telling of a futile attempt on the part of Jon Roise, director of the Friends Center in Nicaragua, to try to get Sue Wheaton to stop spreading accusations that Ruth Paine was working for the CIA. In this account one can see so clearly that the driving cause of Wheaton's suspicion of Ruth Paine was JFK assassination conspiracy authors, in a way that goes beyond reason or anything Ruth said or did, or could have said or done, in Nicaragua—an impossible accusation for Ruth Paine or any innocent person to refute. One can see in this account Roise trying in vain and powerless to get Wheaton from stopping her campaign against Ruth, damaging not only to Ruth but to the work of Friends in Nicaragua. Read and sympathize with Jon Roise as the reasonable voice here, trying but getting nowhere for his efforts. Here is Wheaton's account:

“In early April [1991] Jon Roise [director of the Friends Center program in Nicaragua] asked to talk with me about my telling members of the U.S. community of Ruth Paine's history related to the Kennedy assassination. I agreed, and he came to our house in Managua, where my husband, mother and I talked with him for about an hour. He was concerned that I had a ‘whisper campaign’ going against Ruth and had accused her of being CIA. I said, ‘Wrong on both counts. I haven't been whispering about her history; I've been telling people loud and clear. Second, I never said she was CIA because I have no idea who or what she is. I've said only that she is writing down every name and acronym in sight, which she is.’ Jon said Ruth likes to write things down. He said the Kennedy Assassination was a long time ago and insinuated it was irresponsible of me to ‘stir things up’ at this late date. My husband and I both told him in no uncertain terms why we think history is important. He was familiar with Jim Garrison's case against Clay Shaw and Mark Lane's work (which I found curious, as most people not immersed in JFK assassination reading are very fuzzy on these matters); he said a former roommate of his had known Mark Lane and had found him ‘off the wall.’ He accused me of acting in a ‘McCarthyite way’ and said it would hurt the Quakers' work in Nicaragua. I said this relationship with Oswald wasn't my history; it was Ruth's history, and I

had no intention of not talking about it, and that was far from being McCarthyite, a slur and slant way off the mark. He said the U.S. community had to stick together in Nicaragua. I told him the U.S. population had been deeply divided over policy toward Nicaragua and there were people on both sides of the contra question in the U.S. community in Nicaragua. When he left, we tacitly agreed that we disagreed on almost everything discussed.”

And so Jon Roise tried but failed.

Instead of the allegations of Ruth Paine’s Nicaragua work believed as bedrock truth despite lack of evidence, without hint of questioning or self-doubt, common in JFK assassination conspiracy circles, Ruth Paine would better be honored and remembered for her years of work with ProNica in Nicaragua. Ruth’s years with ProNica reflect the kind of work and activity I have found so very common among the lifelong Friends I have known. This is the Ruth Paine I knew and remember.

From the *ProNica* newsletter, 2014:

“In 1990 Ruth Hyde Paine stepped in ProNica, she became a guiding force for ProNica’s evolution through the 1990s and beyond. Ruth Hyde Paine led the all-volunteer team in St. Petersburg, Florida. She worked with Jim Carlson on newsletters and Norman Malakoff on cargo shipments, all the while garnering and inspiring a new generation of ProNica supporters. In addition, Ruth regularly traveled to Nicaragua to ensure smooth operations at all levels of the organization. She was truly the glue that kept the stateside and Nicaraguan branches working in concert toward a singular mission ...

“In 1996 Ruth Hyde Paine wrote, “We began ten years ago, a volunteer crew of defenders of human rights... We wanted to do something tangible. We now have a very effective organization with a clear mission and skills delivering aid to very well-run projects in Nicaragua.’ In the Florida office in 2006, after 16 years as clerk of ProNica, Ruth Hyde Paine wanted to be near her family in California. It was hard to imagine who could replace her ... Ruth brought a special continuity, with her love and dedication generally translating into full-time volunteer work. Between 1990 and 2006, she traveled to Nicaragua ten times. Affectionately and diligently, she nurtured the bonds between ProNica and its spiritual parent organization, Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM) of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Like clockwork, newsletters went out, donations were processed, bills were paid and hearts were even mended.

Ruth ensured that through every transition, whether in Nicaragua or the US, ProNica’s mission remained right on track.”

Postscript on ProNica

ProNica continued its work in Nicaragua until it came to an end in December, 2022. As of December 2024 the website of ProNica is no more. Here are a few glimpses of the history and story of ProNica.

“Reflections on the History of ProNica”, Oct 2022 video on YouTube. Yarrow Ries, Executive Director of ProNica, discusses the history of ProNica with members of St. Petersburg Friends Meeting, and its planned shutdown at the end of 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ct-JdRjbPGQ>.

“La Belleza: Merari’s Story”, Aug 2015. A story of Acahualinca Women’s Center, Managua. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QauViqdWXYy>.

“Helping North Americans Experience Nicaragua”, March 2011, *Friends Journal*. <https://www.friendsjournal.org/3011033/>.

“Being There”, *Winds of Peace* website, April 2016. Reflections from Bambi Griffin, ProNica Program Director. <https://peacewinds.org/tag/pronica/>.

Board member of ProNica, Kathy, May 2010:

“I feel privileged to serve on the board of ProNica, a Quaker initiated non-profit which was started over 24 years ago to provide material aid and assistance to Nicaraguan communities devastated by war. Most of our projects empower women to feed and sustain their children by providing them job training, family planning, and pre-natal and maternal health care. We have a unique program which trains poor women to become hair dressers and cosmeticians. Many of the graduates from our program are former sex workers. They now work at home or in beauty salons cutting and coloring hair and providing other beauty related services. ProNica has another very positive program which brings delegations of college students to Nicaragua to learn about community development in the third world context and to practice their language skills while engaged directly with people of another culture. I chaperoned a group of 10 teenagers on such a trip and I can bear witness to the

changes in their world view and also themselves in relation to others ...
 ProNica's offices in St. Petersburg, Florida and Managua, Nicaragua are run by women." (<https://greatnonprofits.org/org/pronica-inc>)

Board member of ProNica, Doug McCown:

"I'm unclear of the year, let alone a date, as to when I joined the ProNica community. It was in large part due to a friend's encouragement. How could I, how could any of us, resist the gentle urging of Ruth Hyde Paine? Like now, back in those days, the mid-1990s, the ProNica community consisted of a Board, a few employees, and some supporters. Among these were Lillian Hall and Ken Kinzel. Am I shaking the memory tree for you long-term supporters? I loved this community: how dedicated folks were to assisting Nicaraguans' grass-roots needs! It helped that our decisions were embedded of Quaker process, under the stewardship of Ruth, Herb and Pam Leigh, Lillian, and the many others who have given of themselves over the years..." (*ProNica* newsletter)

"On Not Abandoning..." , *The Friends Newsletter from Nicaragua*, Fall 1990:

"Last spring British Friends sent a Quaker study tour to Nicaragua. 'Nicaragua through Quaker eyes' is the published report of the tour which was arranged in cooperation with Soledad and Jose McIntire of the Friends Center in Nicaragua after the elections. Marigold Best looks at the experience.

"On 25th February 1990 the Sandinista government of Nicaragua was defeated in 'free and fair' elections by the UNO 14-party coalition led by Violeta Chamorro, to the dismay of some, the delight of others and the astonishment of nearly everyone.

"Does this mean that the experience of the Friends who went on the Quaker Study Tour in Nicaragua in May-June 1989, and returned with such a fervent desire to witness to what they experienced, is no longer relevant? BY NO MEANS!! The claim that Nicaragua's is truly 'a different kind of Revolution' is only confirmed by the holding of such exemplary elections ...

"It is very important for us to understand what is happening in Nicaragua, and these vivid accounts of the wide variety of Friends' visits and meetings provide valuable illumination. 'Nicaraguans did not vote for democracy there was much more of that around than they had ever dreamt of in 1979. They voted for

food', wrote the Independent's John Carlin. They (Nicaraguans) saw the effects of the US-backed Contra war and the general longing for its end. The hope that a UNO victory would end the need for conscription was a powerful factor in the election. The message the people had received from Washington, to quote John Carlin again, was 'that to vote Sandinista in Sunday's election was to perpetuate fighting and to accelerate poverty'. A majority of people could not face that prospect.

“Nevertheless, the Sandinistas received about the same proportion of the vote as that which gave Mrs. Thatcher her present majority here! Theirs will be by far the largest single party in the new assembly ... Much of what the Revolution has accomplished is irreversible and nothing can extinguish the generous dedication to achieving a better and more Christian society that the Friends found everywhere they went. Whatever happens, the Nicaraguan people will need international concern and help just as much as ever.”

The Friends Newsletter from Nicaragua, Managua, Fall 1990.

“Pro-Nica has been working with NCAHRN (The National Central American Health Rights Network) for the past three years. A recent statement in its bulletin explains their decision not to cooperate with the U.S. government's Agency for International Development (AID).

“AID, far from being a simple humanitarian service agency, has described itself as “a tool of U.S. foreign policy” and “an economic arm of the State Department.” Its programs are designed to provide “civilian” support to U.S. economic and military interests, and its policies serve to increase inequality, create dependence on imports and foreign capital, and disempower people's organizations and the labor movement. Its activities in Central America have included supplying “non-lethal” aid to the Nicaraguan Contras, building roads and bridges along the Honduran and Costa Rican borders with Nicaragua to facilitate Contra movements, and training the police and judiciary in Guatemala and El Salvador. Acceptance of grants from AID not only implies endorsement of these policies, but cannot help but result in more or less subtle compromises in programs, not to mention participation in information gathering by the U.S. government.”

(Comment: USAID was reopened to Nicaragua after the election victory of U.S.-backed Violeta Chamorro in 1990, removing the Sandinistas from power. This statement appears to be a response to the prospect of USAID money becoming reopened and

flowing into Nicaragua, not a decision to stop receiving USAID money that formerly had been received.)

“What’s New with ProNica?”, *The Friends Newsletter from Nicaragua*, Fall 1990:

“The volatile situation in Nicaragua since the election in February has resulted in disorganization, confusion, and desperate measures to meet desperate needs. ProNica and the Friends Center has been trying to respond in sensitive and creative ways. Our involvement with some projects continues: The Mother Milk Bank and Breast Feeding Programs, the Sawmill projects, the support of medical programs, etc. Quaker House continues to provide a base for travelling friends and meetings and worship...Clothing and medical supplies are being distributed. The preparation of Shipment Number 11 of crucially needed humanitarian aid is underway ... Support for ProNica and the Friends Center (El Centro de Los Amigos) projects has been generously supplied by numerous individuals and groups. A network of support now includes people throughout the U.S., contributions have come from Mexico, Canada, England, Belgium, Finland, Luxembourg, Thailand, and elsewhere. Over fifty monthly and yearly meetings have helped, other people, groups, and churches have participated. Contributions of goods have filled more than ten cargo containers. The National Central American Health Rights Network has made it possible for us to purchase medical supplies at a small percentage of regular prices.”

Ruth Paine, the new director of ProNica, reported on her first visit to Nicaragua in July-Aug 1990, in *The Friends’ Newsletter from Nicaragua*, Fall 1990:

“The news media have lost interest in Nicaragua. Since the election of the Chamorro government it has taken flashy stories such as a strike or street fighting to get international attention. Yet over 200 U.S. nationals working for the State Department have entered the country and been granted work permits. What are they doing? How is the U.S. spending the money appropriated by Congress for Nicaragua? ... I visited the Friends Center in Managua (El Centro de Los Amigos) this summer. When in the country one is surrounded by evidence of a country in desperate need.

“Inflation. When I arrived July 19th the exchange rate was 440,000 cordobas to the dollar. When I left three weeks later the rate was 640,000 to one. By the end of August it was up to 980,000 to the dollar. Devaluations of the cordoba were occurring twice a week. Shopkeepers have major difficulty selling goods for enough profit to be able to afford to buy new stock. Costs are escalating so fast

that the impact is staggering. Inflation is always most cruel to the very poor. And the very poor are the majority in Nicaragua. Bus fares have more than doubled. The previous government provided subsidies for public transportation, fuel, utilities and some foods. All that has stopped. A government desperately short of funds is seeking any means it can to make ends meet. The ends are not meeting.

Medical care. Government funding for medical care has been drastically reduced. Hospitals have had budgets cut, and are no longer being supplied medicines free. Some health posts are being closed because there are no medicines and no funds to pay staff. A friend and cooperant of Pro-Nica reported that 100 infants and young children have died recently in the Matagalpa region. They died from a measles outbreak and from diarrhea/dehydration. These are preventable and treatable diseases. But the means to provide care is rapidly eroding. The infant mortality rate is likely to go up dramatically during the coming year ...

“Our presence as concerned internationals is needed in Nicaragua desperately. After a period of reevaluation and review of our program, ProNica has affirmed its mission to develop projects and provide material aid in Nicaragua. For all of you interested in Nicaragua who have been such important support to our program, we urge your continued support. Through this newsletter and occasional additional updates, we will provide information and feedback on what we accomplish together working side by side with Nicaraguans.”

Brad Stocker, “QEW Mini-Grants and ProNica”, 2016
[\(https://quakerearthcare.org/the-qew-mini-grant-program/\)](https://quakerearthcare.org/the-qew-mini-grant-program/)

“ProNica is a Quaker-founded NGO that currently works in solidarity with nine Nicaraguan projects. The organization began under the guidance of Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM) in 1987, and later evolved into an autonomous NGO. It is still a Quaker organization: six of the seven board members are Friends, and all involved are expected to hold Quaker values. ProNica is funded primarily with donations from SEYM, individuals, and from Friends Witness Tours and other service tours from educational institutions.

“ProNica has no projects of its own; rather, it forms solidarity with those in the country who have work and need support. ProNica follows along the lines of Eduardo Galeano’s ideas:

‘I don’t believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person. I have a lot to learn from other people.’

“Or, as shared by one Friend on the QEW discussion listserv:

‘If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.’ Lila Watson, Aboriginal woman of Australia.”

“ProNica’s Story”, from the old ProNica website:

“Ruth Paine directed ProNica for many years, working steadily building the organization and its reputation for integrity and true solidarity. Ruth never collected a salary. ProNica sponsored AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) workshops in Nicaraguan prisons in the 1990s and eventually spread across the country by training ‘trainers’ using the AVP model to teach non-violence and self-empowerment [<https://avpusa.org>]. Money was raised to drill wells in communities to provide safe potable water sources. Cooperative groups of women were given funding to jointly raise poultry to earn money and feed their families. ProNica helped develop a cooperative’s transition to the production of organic sesame oil, which garnered a fair trade contract with The Body Shop. The ProNica newsletter told stories of Nicaraguan communities organizing collective responses to their post-war needs for trauma healing, feeding and housing displaced people, establishing free clinics for women for cancer screening, pre and post natal care, family planning, and counseling for the high rates of abuse and post-traumatic stress.”