

From Inside **NICARAGUA**

ROSA

of the Wild Grass

We asked Rosa's mother, and later her sisters and brothers, to contribute as well. So began chapter 1 with her mother, Doña Maria, talking about growing up under the Somoza dictatorship and her life as a mother of eight in her rural hometown, La Concha. She was very religious and she felt blessed that all of them had survived the revolution against Somoza and later the Contra war.

As a poor peasant family, Rosa then tells how she left home aged 13 to work as a maid in the capital, Managua. Ten years on, in 1976, she was still a cleaner when she went to work for a family who turned out to be Sandinista revolutionaries. Overnight they had turned her life upside down and set her on a dangerous path as their arms courier. Rosa was pregnant and feared she would miscarry or be killed herself. Her two other children were safer left with her mother in La Concha.

“Back in 1987 I suggested to my friend Rosa, her story would explain a great deal about Nicaragua, and from a woman's point of view. 28 years later this had grown into ‘Rosa of the Wild Grass’. The intimacy and immediacy captured in this work inspired me to paint a series of stark black and white images to illustrate this story.”

Translated, Edited & Illustrated by **Fiona Macintosh**



In chapter 2 the fireworks of the revolution explode. The Sandinistas had taken power. This was in 1979. She tells how she had moved on in every way, separating from her partner, and his drinking. Like so many other single mothers, she'd manage, especially now she had a good job in a print works and her three children were attending school. She and her friends had achieved a great deal over the years to make life better in her barrio and workplace.

But she was telling me this in 1988 with a sense of deep anxiety. Since 1981 the US backed Contra war had escalated and the destruction was being felt by everyone. Everything she'd fought for and worked for, was now dying.

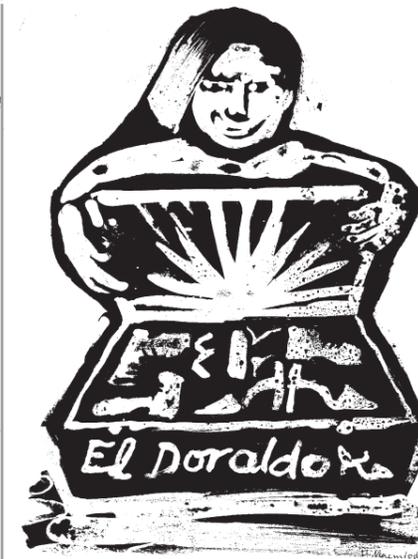
That year I left Nicaragua promising to be back and did so in 1990 after the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas. If it was hard before, all Rosa could see now was rising unemployment and land evictions. In the State sector, factories, healthcare and education, and the agrarian reform were all under attack and the fallout led to mass unrest. She was near breaking-point herself with no work, and only just getting by selling ice from home. Beans and rice and her children were all that kept her going, (Chapter 3).



Three years later (Chapter 4) she'd heard a soya kitchen was being set up in her barrio to feed the hundreds of hunger kids. When she got involved she realised many of the women volunteers had problems like hers; many had lost loved ones in the Contra war. It was working together and talking together every day that pulled them through. They were one of many women groups that had started up around the country to become a network, growing 'like wild grass' Rosa said, tough, fast and strong.



Chapter 5: In 1998 Hurricane Mitch hit Nicaragua and Rosa went to set up a soya communal kitchen with a group of women survivors in Poseltega, and she's pleased the kitchen is still going today. By then she'd adopted a baby girl, Sara. The mother had given her to Rosa. She was a drug addict, like so many others in the barrio. There was also a lot not right with Rosa's daughter, Angelica, and when Rosa's mother died she faced her own health crisis. Rosa landed up in hospital and that horrendous experience in 2002 brought home the loss of the health service they once had under the Sandinista government.



In 2008 Rosa was having to take stock (Chapter 6). While the women's network still held strong, her barrio had become a no-go-zone. The growing crime made her and the children decide to leave for their hometown, La Concha and to be again with her sisters and brother. The Sandinista leader, Daniel Ortega, had been voted back in, but for many like Rosa, he was now just another corrupt politician. Others in her family though thought differently. Her brother, Carlos, remains loyal to the Sandinistas. We both wanted to bring their opinions and stories into the book. Her sister, Flor, wanted to talk about her daughter's illegal crossing into the US, and Angelica spoke of her hair-raising work in the police force, and her troubled love life. Read together, their eight voices affirm Rosa's close family bonds.





On my visit in 2013 we recorded the last chapter 7. Rosa had borrowed land from one of her brothers for planting and was making ends meet. She felt settled and happy, but concerned for the younger ones. Her daughter's ex husband is a gangster in Managua and that's why Rosa is glad to be caring for her grandchildren in La Concha, just like her mum had helped her. Poverty is everywhere which, she said, isn't the problem. The problem was when poverty combined with social injustice and generations of conflict.

Rosa and all her family decided to change their names to avoid any repercussions for anything they have said."

Fiona Macintosh

Main Text 74,000 words
With Preface by Fiona Macintosh
50 B/W illustrations
14,300 word Chronology

Audience:

'Rosa of the Wild Grass' is written in the first-person and accessible as an entertaining and easy read to reach a wide audience. It is also an excellent resource for students and teachers of Latin American / Gender politics / Development, the politics of Nationalism and Globalisation; Human and Trade Union Rights.

Fiona Macintosh is a writer, artist, photographer and art psychotherapist tutor with an Anthropology & Sociology BA. She is co-author of 'The Tiger's Milk, Women of Nicaragua' published by Virago and Seaver Books in 1987. She lived and worked in Nicaragua during the 1980's and since then has been a regular visitor.

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