

## Barrio Edgar Munguia 2001: At home in the barrio

The sense of safety and peace that we experienced in the sisters' house continued as we walked through the darkened streets of the barrio to our lodging at night.

Sister Fidelina assured us that it was safer to walk through the barrio than to go on the main thoroughfares after dark. The people in the neighborhood had been informed who we were and respected us as friends of the sisters.

Later in the evening, the dim streetlights keep us from stumbling on rocks or stepping on refuse. What is surprising is the silence of the barrio. The populace consists mostly of people of the Sandinista party, and they are proud that their neighborhood is known for its lack of violence. The few gangs of the barrio operate in other neighboring barrios that have not provided security protection for their residents.

Cars, which are rare, and the more common motorcycles are stored in the little enclosures in front of the houses. The air is hot, humid, and heavy. Front doors are left open to admit some circulation. In the faint light coming from the open doors, we see families sitting around television sets, watching soap operas from the United States and other countries. Few people are outside.

We had expected that people might be preparing the evening meal or sitting around the family table. But there is no aroma of cooking. There are rare signs of relaxed family gatherings. Because of poverty in the barrio, it is customary to have just one meal each day, and that is at noon. Rice and beans are the staples. At breakfast, a cup of coffee, and for supper, perhaps a few pieces of sweet bread and a beverage.

Except for a few young men tossing a football under the streetlights and an occasional group of men chatting outside, there are no signs of activity. A possible explanation surfaces during our visit. The majority of households in the barrio consist of single working mothers and their children.

The mother has to leave the children at home alone as she goes out to do cooking, ironing, laundry and cleaning to bring in some income. The men are mostly unemployed and make a little money by selling things on the streets of the city or in the barrios. Work almost always is temporary and part-time. For those who are fortunate to have it, work is exhausting; for the others, the lack of work is often disheartening.



Pentecostal church in the barrio

One reassuring sight on our usual route is a simple Pentecostal church, bearing the sign, "Puesto de Salud, Vida y Fraternidad." (A Place of Salvation, Life and Brotherhood).

The animosity and competition that so often divides sects and churches seems absent in Barrio Edgar Munguia.



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