

Two will travel to Nicaragua

By WILLIAM B. HAYNES

Nicaragua. The word thunders across the imagination. It fills the headlines of the nation's newspapers, and covers placards carried by marchers in front of the nation's capitol. The President of the United States has argued for aid to Contras fighting the Sandinista government there. It brings to mind jungles and war and covert support by the super powers.

Two Arlington residents, Helena Halperin and her daughter Julia, 19, will travel into the midst of the debate — to the country itself — to discover for themselves what is going on in Nicaragua and how Nicaraguans perceive the Sandinista government and the Contras.

The two will leave Boston Aug. 1 for a month in Nicaragua as part of a tree-planting project.

"I had been thinking about a trip to Central America but I had not decided on where or when," said Helena. "At Christmas Julia said 'Mom, I want to go to Nicaragua with you next summer.'"

"It sounded like an experience not to miss, for adventure and learning," said Julia, "and I wanted to protect her."

"I will be more cautious with her than without her," said Helena.

The two will be a part of a group of 39 people, including seven or eight from the Boston area.

They will live in either Leon or around Managua, and will labor in the summer heat to replant trees in areas that were cleared for grazing land.

Both Helena and Julia are being tutored in Spanish before they leave. Helena is a member of the Nicaragua Study Group in Arlington, and was a part of the Central America Study Group in town last fall. She has been reading about the region in preparation for the trip.

It will be hard work for both of them. Neither Helena nor Julia are used to strenuous physical labor, yet they will arise at 5 a.m. every day to



Helena Halperin and her daughter, Julia, are travelling to Nicaragua for the month of August to plant trees and to learn about the country.

(Paul Drake photo)

plant trees for seven or eight hours.

The two are looking forward to speaking to the people as much as they are pleased to be contributing to the environment.

"I am very concerned about the direction of U.S. foreign policy in Central America in general and Nicaragua in particular," said Helena. "I have no way of making a decision of what is going on there. There are wildly conflicting accounts here."

"I think this will give us a very good opportunity to talk to people in many different circumstances," she said. "In war the first casualty is truth. I am not sure how truthfully we are being informed."

Helena and Julia hope the people they speak to can help them learn the "truth" in Nicaragua.

Helena has travelled to China, the Soviet Union and Haiti and said people were afraid to reveal how they really felt about issues. Both women hope Nicaraguans will be more will-

ing to express their praise or dissatisfaction with the Sandinista government.

They both are a little nervous about the trip. In addition to fear of being caught in a battle, both are concerned about the difficulty of work, the heat, and the lack of basic amenities.

"I am interested in the idea of physical labor," said Julia. "I have never done that before. Planting trees is helpful, and I like the idea of experiencing things besides those that are intellectual and comfortable."

"We are doing something tangible to help the planet, even if it is very small," said Helena.

"Deforestation is a major global problem. Regardless of the decision I make about Nicaragua, this work is very beneficial to Nicaragua. I hope we can accomplish a significant amount."

Julia will take pictures of Nicaragua and Helena plans on keeping a journal and writing an article for The Advocate.

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