

Las Quinchas

The People of the Dump: la Chureca

Around 1500 people arrive in Managua's (Nicaragua) "Chureca" dump, near the Acahualinca barrio, on the great Lake Nicaragua, each day. They manage to earn a little money to survive by collecting and selling garbage. 53% of them are under 18 years old.

They collect plastic, glass, paper, aluminum and other metals. On a "good" day they collect 100 kg of plastic, 100 kg of glass, 10 pounds of aluminum. Entire families work from six o'clock in the morning all day long in this hell, sheltering themselves from sun or rain under a cardboard box or in the shade of their "family" cart. Children begin their career as early as four years old, helping to keep guard on collected material, choosing, cleaning. In the beginning, they search for "easy" materials, such as paper and plastic; sometimes they find toys in the rubbish. At 14 years old they know how to do everything a "basurero" worker needs to. 92% of the "People of the Dump" live in semi-destroyed houses, sometimes sharing a room with up to 6 other people, with no access to drinkable water, health services or education. 62% has no access to toilets. Illiteracy rate amongst over- fifteen year olds is 25%. Under the Chureca is a small inhabited area with huts made of wood and metal sheets where prostitutes and huelepega (glue and other drug addicts) live along with families.

In the "Chureca" (42 acres) tens of trucks dump 900 tons of garbage every day. Garbage collectors are already waiting for them and they quickly "attack" the new mound with any possible tool. The trucks bring up blinding clouds of dust. Periodically, airplanes drop combustible material on the dump which is set on fire: more highly toxic smoke surrounds the people who work there. In summer temperatures rise over 40°C. In winter, under the pouring rain, the dump becomes a marsh, the ground completely muddy. There can be many different hazards, such as accidents caused by truck drivers or wounds from sharp objects. Infirmities are worsened by lack of hygiene: coughs, malaria fever, hemorrhagic dengue, lice, skin infections, blood poisoning caused by mercury. Six thousand years ago people and animals left their tracks, "huellas", on the shores of the Lake. The ashes have cherished this remote mark of life and death of the American continent until today. Six thousand years later, men, women and children walk along rubbish paths in Acahualinca hell.