

## On the road from Morgantown to La Hermandad.

It's a youth movement, a shining example, and an inspiration! All that I somewhat selfishly desired was a source for great, fresh-roasted coffee beans in Morgantown. You gave me that. Even my unrefined palate can taste the delicious chocolate notes mentioned in an earlier blog post. Thank you.

But the whole package, the entity that is called WVU FIRSTHAND Cooperative CSA, is so much more. I'm quickly discovering that it's like a young but growing family, hosting coffee happy hours and pot luck picnics, partnering with local coffee roasters and retailers. And it's part of a larger, extended family (Fair Trade 2.0) that funds cooperative development projects including organic gardening and eco-tourism to facilitate income diversity and food sovereignty in small farming communities such as La Hermandad.

Of course, students, faculty, farmers, partners, and most members are already familiar with these FIRSTHAND Coop details. I just wanted to put them up front for newcomers like me. Why, I even had to search Google and resort to Wikipedia to learn that CSA refers to community-supported or community-shared agriculture.

So what might we find on the road from Morgantown to La Hermandad? The title was inspired by a line in the recent "Spring Break 2014" post. It refers to WVU students in Nicaragua collecting data to create an interactive map, a portion of which will allow us ultimately to travel a virtual road from San Ramon to Cooperative La Hermandad, where grow the wonderful coffee beans that kicked off my membership journey with FIRSTHAND Coop.

The journey that WVU students and Le Hermandad farmers are making together, though, is much bigger than just fair-trade coffee. And though current projects may be somewhat focused on economics and community support, lessons learned and relationships developed through such cooperative experiences may well be sowing fields of yet unknown, bountiful crops.

A separate FIRSTHAND Coop web page notes that Cooperative La Hermandad arose out of a devastating civil war. Nicaragua's lengthy *Revolución Popular Sandinista* ended with its Contra War, which rekindles for some of us painful memories of the U.S. - U.S.S.R. Cold War. West Virginia statehood also arose out of a devastating civil war. Personal, life-changing journeys arise, too, out of weavings of war and peace.

Take Odysseus, for example. After ten years of war at Troy, he loses himself for another ten years traveling what should have been a peaceful, sea road home. He wrestles monsters, nymphs, gods, and goddesses – virtual inner demons of middle age, one might suggest. He encounters cultures as different from Ithaca as La Hermandad from Morgantown. Albeit a bit later in life than WVU students visiting Nicaragua, the returning Odysseus is more mindful and much wiser. He learns from and is changed by his experiences. Certainly his odyssey planted the seeds for Western philosophy.

It is not much of a stretch to imagine FIRSTHAND Coop students becoming more mindful, wiser men and women as they learn from their own encounters and experiences on the road from Morgantown to La Hermandad. That is my hope for the future. Well, that and maybe an excursion with FIRSTHAND Coop on an eco-tour. Okay, all that and more great coffee beans, too!