

unl puerto ricans fight homesickness with friendship

by bonnie lutz

A year ago, a student, lonely and a little homesick wrote his friends at home, telling them of the opportunities at college and urging them to join him.

His letters were successful. Six of his high school buddies came to UNL in the fall of 1977.

For these students, the move to UNL was a big one, when home to them is a culture, a language, a climate, thousands of miles away in Puerto Rico.

One of the students, Rosa Otero, a sophomore in pre-med, last year attended a university in her hometown Ponce, Puerto Rico, before coming to UNL this year.

She said the schools are comparable academically in the United States and Puerto Rico, but learning every thing in English makes it difficult at UNL.

Otero explained that English is taught as a second language when a child first enters school in Puerto Rico.

"We study English since we start school, but we don't speak it usually. We just learn to write it and to read it," she said.

Jose Carro Ortiz, a freshman pre-med student, said a major reason for his decision to come to the United States was to learn English.

Alberto Torraca, a sophomore in mechanical engineering, remembers when he arrived at UNL and ate in his residence hall cafeteria. People would speak English very rapidly, and he could not understand what they were saying.

"I would just laugh if they laugh, there was nothing I could do," he said.

Torraca said he enjoys having his friends from Puerto Rico at UNL.

"We are united," Otero said. "Most of the time, we are all together, but we deal—talk with American people. We go to the activities that they do," she said.

Ortiz celebrated his 19th birthday in April American style, by going to bars. He said drinking is viewed differently in Puerto Rico than in the United States. There is a drinking age in Puerto Rico, but people are not regularly checked for identification.

"You can drink at one year, three years, four years," he said.

Torraca said he has seen more drinking problems with people living in the United States than in Puerto Rico. He referred to a UNL student he knows who often drinks 35 beers a night, which is unheard of in Puerto Rico.

The students agreed that they miss their families, certain foods and the climate of Puerto Rico.

Torraca said in Puerto Rico, they have rice and beans daily.

"One gets tired of eating mashed potatoes every day," he said.

Ortiz said Nebraska is good for studying, because it is quiet.

When the foreign students saw snow for the first time, they stayed outside until very early in the morning.

"The first time I saw it, I said 'oh it is so pretty,'" Ortiz said, "but the second time . . . it is too cold. I grew to hate it."

Ortiz said people in the United States seem "very independent."

"Sometime I think that people don't care over here, maybe it is because I am a foreign student. I think that one can find people that care, people that don't care, anywhere," he said.

Torraca said even though he was born in Puerto Rico, he is American.

"We are born with a United States citizenship, so we are American citizens," he said.

Otero explained that Puerto Ricans cannot vote for the president of the United States, but they do have a representative in Washington, D.C., who does not have voting privileges.

The students agreed that people generally have three views toward governmental rule in Puerto Rico.

"We have people in groups. One favors the way that we



Photo by Mark Billingsley

Alberto Torraca (left) urged six high school friends from Puerto Rico to attend UNL. Rosa Otero is one of the six.

are now, one wants the island to become a state, and one wants independence. Most people want to stay the way we are now," Otero said.

"I think that we have more opportunities staying (the same) than being a state or (independent)," she said.

"It is nice to have our own flag and go to the Olympic games and have our proper teams and cheer to Puerto Rico. It is nice. I like it," Ortiz said.

Otero said Puerto Ricans watch U.S. foreign and domestic affairs very closely.

"We do care, because we are affected," she said.

She said each time the United States has a price increase, Puerto Rico feels the effects too, because most of its produce is imported from the United States.

Ortiz and Torraca said they believe Puerto Rico takes care of its people.

"Everybody in Puerto Rico eats," Ortiz said. "They don't die because of no food."

"We've got a lot of programs in Puerto Rico. We take the poor people out from where the poorness is, and sometimes they do not like where they are taken, so they go back to where they were," Torraca said.

"We do a lot of things to help," Torraca said.

Otero summed up her feelings of the differences between people living in Puerto Rico and the United States.

"Here the people, their life is faster. They hurry all the time. In Puerto Rico, we do not walk as fast as we do here. Their attitude toward their life is different than ours," she said.

Torraca said only 11 Puerto Rican students go to UNL. But Otero said there are large groups of Puerto Ricans in other parts of the United States.

"We know that New York City had a big population of Puerto Ricans. Almost one third of the population of Puerto Rico lives there," Otero said.

"They are not like Puerto Ricans, in Puerto Rico. We call them Neuricans. They are not of the same character, and they do not usually like to speak Spanish. Sometimes they talk bad about Puerto Rico," she said.

Otero explained that the Neuricans usually are second generational Puerto Ricans, born in New York.

All three students plan on returning to Puerto Rico after graduation to find jobs.

"I don't think I'm going to stay in my hometown," Otero said.

"If you stay in a town where everybody knows you, it is hard to make business," she said.

The students see differences in the two countries, but do not want to make any major changes in their country.

"The way that we are accustomed, I want to keep having (it) the same way," Torraca said. I think the differences make the countries."

venezuelan news and culture are reflected in

by paula dittrick

A dream to promote Venezuelan culture has materialized into a musical ensemble and a radio program, according to Carlos Siso, UNL electrical engineering major.

Siso spends his Sunday afternoons airing Latin American Views from 1 to 3 p.m. on KZUM-FM. The program includes both folk and modern music from Latin America.

Siso said he calls his brother in Venezuela every Sunday morning to learn about Latin American news not reported by the U.S. media. He shares the news with his listeners.

The program is in English. Siso said he has received several calls from Americans

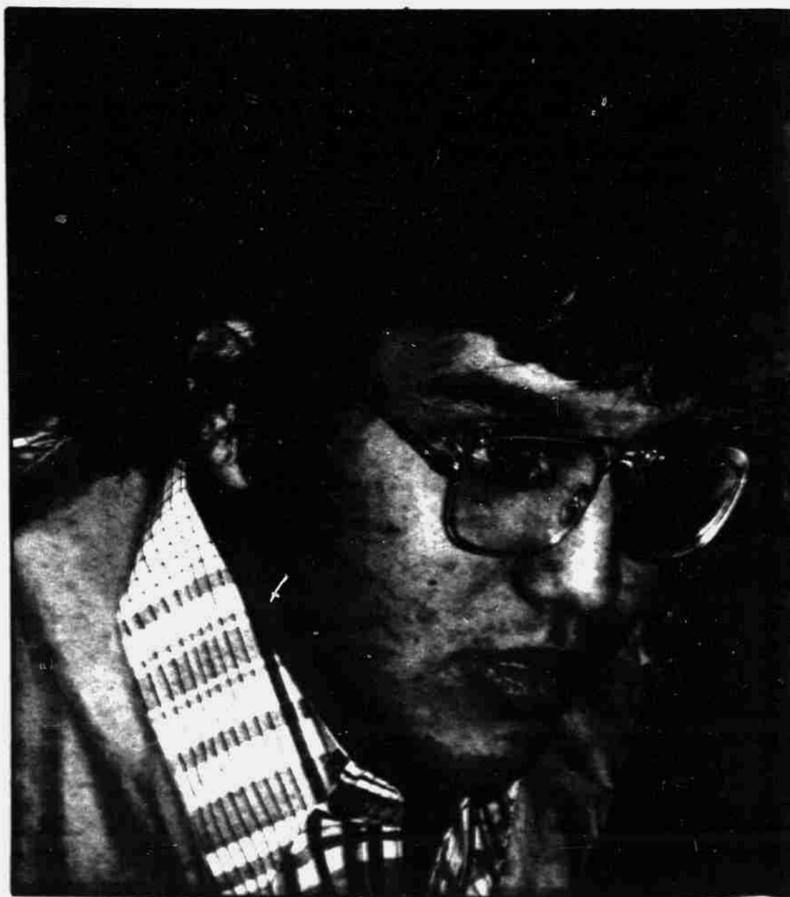


Photo by Tim F

Concerning his radio program, Carlos Siso said he calls his brother in Venezuela to learn more about Latin American news.