

April 2015

Dear Friends and Family,

Lately, we have reflected a lot on the Easter story and who Jesus was and why He came to Earth. Samy and Anthony are always asking great questions like, “Did He have to die?” or “What about those guys next to Him on the Cross?” While often death can feel far away, unfortunately this year we have experienced the death of an uncle in January and then right before Easter one of our Rottweilers died. We are not sure if it was natural causes or rat poison that was thrown onto our property, but in either case we definitely mourned the loss of Bentley, our big dog, and the issue of death was very close that week as we talked about Christ. Life is full of ups and downs. Thankfully, the death of Christ is not the end because every Easter morning we are able to celebrate the biggest UP this world will ever know – His resurrection from the dead!

Now for a little news from each of us...

#### From Nicole

**One morning in January I woke up to find** our front room covered with boxes and large sacks. Thankfully I am now walking because it would have been difficult to crawl amongst all of those boxes of notebooks and school supplies. A team of people came from Pennsylvania to help my mom pack up all of the backpacks which was great because I do not think my mom could have done it all by herself. Plus, it also meant lots of people wanted to play with me! I love all of the attention although at the same time I am at that stage of wanting to do things more for myself.

Once backpacks were done and the team was gone, Mommy and I often go out in the mornings to pay scholarships, do errands or go to the bank. I love being out with Mommy and find it funny how many people like me so much. Just a couple of weeks ago at a school a lady I did not even know picked me up, told me how adorable I was, put me back down and kept on going. Then the other day at the bank I was waving good-bye to everyone as we left including two older men who were talking outside. They had a good laugh at me waving to them; maybe because they did not know who I was either.

#### From Anthony

**I enjoyed being able to help pack the backpacks this year.** Samy and I would walk alongside our kitchen counter each with a backpack and put in one box of crayons, two pencils, two pens, etc. The group always counted out how many of each thing we needed before we started a group of backpacks. They were always excited when everything worked out perfectly and there were no extra glue sticks or any other items left over.

One of the fun activities that I was involved in lately was a fun run for my school. Every two years my school hosts a big festival with games and food and crafts. In the morning before the festival starts, there is a fun run to help raise money for the school. I ran a 1 kilometer race with some of the other kids in my class. It was fun though I started out a bit too fast and got tired on the second lap, but after I caught my breath, I then sprinted out the last lap.

#### From Samantha

**The last couple of times that I have returned from visiting my grandparents in the States,** I have had a hard time readjusting to life in Managua. Sometimes I do not like how dirty and unorganized things can be here. Compared to people I know in the States I feel like we do not have much, but then compared to so many people here I feel like we have a lot, and I do not understand why people here do not have more money or things. It is hard for my mind to understand all of this, though my mom says that sometimes it is hard for her too. She also says that it is good for us to experience life with different people and to learn about what it means to have a lot and to have little.

Just the other day we went to a farm for the day with another family. We go out to this farm about twice a year and just hang out. The couple who live there manage the farm; they do not own it, but the owner is never there. It is a very relaxing day of swimming in a local river, eating fresh corn and watermelon, riding horses and watching the cows come in. It is trips like these that show me how the simple things of life – family, friends, fresh food, and nature – are often the best things of life. I am thankful to God for the many gifts He has given me!





**From Thomas**

**In March I finished the community soccer league** which uses the soccer field at the school where I work during the week. It was a successful league in that everything ran smoothly, and there were not any problems with any of the players. In all of the years that I have been doing this, I have given devotionals at some point during the afternoon when the teams were playing. For this past league I was more intentional about focusing on those devotionals and invited some missionaries to come as guest speakers. It was a great decision as the players were able to hear about Christ from different Christian men.



One of the highlights of the past couple of months was being invited to be a chaperone on the High School Senior Retreat for the school where I teach. Amanda finds it funny that, although I teach classes to the preschoolers through sixth graders, I am actually quite close with the highschoolers. The seniors go on a retreat each year and besides their advisors, they get to choose two more teachers to accompany them on the retreat. Of course it is still work; but three days at a beach house in San Juan del Sur--I would do that any day!! (Not sure how often Amanda would let me go though!)



**From Amanda**



In January we hosted a team from State College, PA that comes each year to work with us at the sports center. They raise a majority of the money that funds the scholarship program, and therefore, it is fitting that they get to help pack over 600 backpacks and deliver them to the children. After they left I began making my rounds to the different universities to pay for 57 university students who are now receiving a scholarship through the program. Two more students are set to finish their classes and earn their degrees this year. One of them, Karina Bonilla Alfaro, has asked me to accompany her the day she graduates. Most students have one of their parents walk with them, but when I asked her about that, she replied that it would mean more to her to have me than her mom. I am honored to be asked but still feel a bit uncomfortable taking her mother's place.



In Nicaragua one of the areas of life that seems to suffer greatly is that of marriage. Thomas and I know many broken families and many stories of adultery. In the past six months we found out about three couples whom we know personally that had some difficult times and decided to end their commitments to each other. We really hurt for these couples and started praying that God would bring them back to together. Thankfully, each of these couples has come back together and is working through their differences. One of these couples approached Thomas and me and asked if we would be willing to counsel them. For the past month we have met with them weekly and have encouraged them in their commitment to God and to each other. Last December there was a lot of anger and hurt in this couple. It has been exciting to see God bring them back together and see the joy in their faces! Praise God!



Daily life for me in Nicaragua is an open book. I often wake up in the morning, get my older two children off to school with Thomas and then begin my plan for the day knowing full well that at any moment it could change. Like the day I received a text message from someone who was trying to call me but did not have any minutes on his phone. Normally, I do not call back if I do not know who it is, but that day I did, only to discover a guy in the neighborhood had overdosed on some pain medication and needed a ride to the hospital. Thankfully, Halle was around to take him as they had to carry him out of his house. As I stayed behind, it was a perfect moment to pray with his wife and the surrounding neighbors who were very shaken up. He received the medical attention he needed and is doing much better.



We literally never know what might happen each day, and I pray that we all would be willing to listen to God's voice as He leads us day to day to do things for His glory!



Seeking Him for life,

*Thomas, Amanda, Samantha, Anthony y Nicole Gutiérrez*

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