

January 2012



Dear Friends and Family,

What a beautiful time of year! In Nicaragua the rains have died down and the winds have picked up which can make it just a bit chilly. Now I know that most of you laugh at that statement since you are either looking outside at snow or at least have temperatures below 50. After living in Nicaragua for almost 10 years, for me not turning my fan on at night means that it is chilly. Below is a little bit of what life has been like for the past months.



From Samantha

I am loving preschool though it can be hard to get up at 6 am. It took me awhile to get used to that though I think it was harder on Mommy ☺. But once I am at school, I enjoy learning and playing. In November we had a Thanksgiving concert, and all the kids in my class sang a song. Then we had our Christmas concert, and we performed another song. I practiced our songs every day. At the end of the school day I ride the school bus home. Mommy said she was willing to come pick me up, but I really wanted to take the bus. Mommy says I am quite independent though I'm not sure what that means.



One of my favorite experiences lately was being one of 15 *jardineras* for a *quince años*. My oldest cousin, Yahoska, was turning 15 and here in Nicaragua that is a big deal so her family threw a huge party. I got to wear a beautiful pink dress, high heel shoes and a crown of flowers on my head. It was my favorite day!



Right now I am visiting Grandma and Grandpa. I love flying on a plane to California for Christmas. We have had a great time playing, staying up late and eating lots of goodies.

From Anthony

Life has been great lately. There is such a freedom to being able to walk all over the place. What I never knew about learning to walk is that once you can walk then you can also climb. Mommy says that I have a real knack for climbing. One day Sami left a toy that I wanted up on the island in the kitchen. It was really high up so I tried standing on my small plastic chair to reach it, but that did not work. So I put the plastic chair next to my mommy's tall stool and was able to climb right up. Mommy was very surprised to see me sitting on the kitchen island when she walked in. I tried to tell her that I was just getting the toy, but I don't think she understood.



And speaking of being understood, this whole idea of learning two languages at the same time has got me quite confused. I have just decided to make up my own language. The only problem is that Mommy listens to me like she understands, but then she says something totally off the topic. I may just have to learn her language after all.



From Thomas

It has been a year since my motorcycle accident, and I am thankful to God for helping me heal and recuperate from the injuries. I am also very thankful to all of you who have prayed for my healing. In this year I have been able to see how difficult it is for people who have disabilities. I have realized how easy it is when we are totally healthy that we often forget to give thanks to God. Then when something unexpected happens to us that affects our health, we can then see the reality of how great life is when all is well and how marvelous God is as we heal. I hope to keep getting better, to be running soon and playing sports with the guys and especially with Sami and Anthony.



In these last couple of months I have been more involved with a younger group of guys in the neighborhood. While I am still involved in running a soccer league for older youth (18+), I have come to realize that the best influence I can have with the youth is with the younger guys (10-17). Many of these youth have not yet made set decisions about their futures, are still in school and have not experimented too much or at all with drugs, sex and drinking. So in spending time with them I try to encourage them to see the bad influences in their lives and the effect that those have had on some of the older boys. I try and talk to them about continuing their education and about making smarter decisions for their futures. I would like to start taking a group of them to my home church so that they can see other youth of their same age who are involved in the church and have similar lives as they do but are not choosing to be involved in things like drugs, sex or drinking.





From Amanda

Over the past couple of months life has fallen into a little bit more of a rhythm. Up at 6 to get Sami ready for school, out the door with Anthony for a walk or a run around 7:30 and then onto the list of things to do for the morning. Some days that list consists of three to four loads of laundry or mowing our entire lawn. While other days it means paying university scholarships or meeting with perspective college students who are hoping to study in 2012. Other days it means managing finances to make sure that everything balances as it should. And then other days it means working with a short-term team.



In the past two months we have hosted three different teams. Two of those teams were made up of three people each. One team did a lot of work around the sports center while the other team focused on baseball and evangelism. This second team was made up of men who had played professional baseball and enjoyed using their love of the sport to teach youth about Christ. The third team came from a church outside of Seattle, WA. They worked hard around the sports center and enjoyed some evenings with the local youth sharing their faith. One lady offered a sewing class and taught 9 women and 1 man how to sew bags and skirts. It was a great way to connect with people in the community.



The school year has ended, graduations have been held and it is now summer break in Nicaragua. In these past three months I have had 10 graduating high school seniors come to me to ask about the possibility of a scholarship that would enable them to go on to college. I would love to be able to offer all 10 of these students the chance to continue their education. In 2012 I will have 39 university students in my scholarship program. Each year I try to find new donors for the scholarship program, especially people interested in sponsoring a particular student for the five years of their college experience, approximately a \$2000 donation. Here are the names of the 10 new college students for 2012: Adriana Cruz, Carlos Cruz, Winston Pichardo, Deyvin Robles, Karina Largaespada, Claudia Vargas, Noel Quiroz, Yerald Gutierrez, Katerin Morales and Luis Ortiz. If you are interested in giving a one-time donation or sponsoring one of the students listed above, please email me for more details.



Hope you have enjoyed a wonderful Christmas season celebrating the birth of our Savior and may this New Year be one of life abundant!



Seeking Him for life,

Thomas, Amanda, Samantha y Anthony Gutierrez

Eastside Development PO Box 301471 Portland, OR 97294

Email: amanda@amandaythomas.com For more info, please check: www.amandaythomas.com