

December 2015

Dear Friends and Family,

My intention had been to write this letter back in September; however, life took some unexpected turns for me personally in August, and it was hard to find the words to write. I have now had some time to reflect and rest and appreciate all the good things that God can bring out of unexpected times. So as Thanksgiving has passed, and we are looking forward to Christmas, we are so thankful for a God who is present in our day-to-day lives and forever in control, no matter our circumstances. We hope you have plenty to be thankful for too no matter your circumstances. Enjoy our family update ...

From Nicole

For me these past months have been great! I am only two so I do not understand much of what happened to my mommy except that I know she has an "oowie" that I check on almost daily. My favorite moments from this summer were all the different teams that came to visit. I really enjoyed the youth team from Woodinville because the youth leader brought her family, and her youngest son was a one year old. I had lots of fun being his friend while they were here. Throughout their time the team did skits to Bible stories for the kids at the feeding program, held arts and crafts afternoons and helped do various work projects around the sports center. At feeding program I enjoy listening to Kathy play the guitar and all the kids that sing along. Just a couple of weeks ago I shared with my mom that I too was learning the song, "I have decided to follow Jesus." It took her a bit to figure out exactly what I was saying, but she was amazed that I had picked up the words to the song just from hearing them at the feeding program.

From Anthony

The highlights from my summer were traveling to Colorado for my Uncle Luke's wedding and hanging out with guys like Brian and Evan and Francisco and Jeffrey. Francisco and Jeffrey came with a team from a Spanish-speaking church in Philadelphia. It was unique for us to have a Spanish-speaking team. We did not have to translate much! I enjoyed hanging out with Francisco and Jeffrey and playing sports with them with the kids in the afternoons. On our trip to Colorado we spent some time in Denver, but most of the week was up in the mountains. I had so much fun going on a six-mile hike and seeing the mountains and a river. Upon arriving back in Nicaragua, the family team from Bellevue was already here so the next day we were hanging out with them. The same families came three years ago so it was a fun reunion to see them all again. Brian and Evan let me tag along with them doing work projects and hanging out in the hammocks during break time. I know life was hard for my mom for a time as I started back to school. It was hard for me to understand all that she was going through, but she did tell us many times that God is the One in control and we can trust Him even when times are hard.

From Samantha

I also loved our trip to Colorado! We got to see snow in the mountains, and my dad and I made snow angels. While we were there, we stayed in a mountain house with my grandparents and my Aunt Dana and her family. The days were filled with games, good food and playing with our cousins. My favorite was the wedding day. We got all dressed up and took lots of pictures. The wedding was outside and was very beautiful. I stayed up super late that night dancing with a bunch of Luke and Kristin's friends. It was so much fun!

We were welcomed back to Nicaragua by a family team that had worked with us three years ago. All four families came back, and it was fun to see everyone again. All of the kids have grown so much, and everyone got to meet Nicole. I had a blast hanging out with the girls. We did Bible story skits, planned crafts, played games, painted and got to know each other better. I really hope they come back again!

As the summer drew to a close I was very sad for my mom and for our family. I was so excited about having another baby in our family. I definitely learned that God is the One who plans our days even when it is not what we would have wanted. And now I am excited again because after all that we have gone through, my mom is going to have another baby come June!

From Thomas

My Saturday soccer league is back in full swing. I continue to enjoy my involvement as organizer of the league and coach of one of the teams. Most of the guys on my team are from the neighborhood where we live. Three of the guys on my team receive a university scholarship from Amanda's scholarship program. Two of them have excelled so much in soccer that they play for their university team in both outdoor and

indoor soccer. I am very proud of these young men as they make decisions to keep studying and think about their futures.

Every Saturday the league hosts three games. Between the first and second game we have a devotional time for the teams that are present. Some Saturdays I share the message, but there are also other men who come and share. It is a great way to share our faith and challenge these young men in what they believe and how they are choosing to live their lives. My prayer is that God uses our words as well as the whole soccer league experience to continue to speak into the lives of these young men.

Life has definitely been full of some ups and downs in the last four months. I know Amanda has struggled, and it has hurt me to see her in pain. At one point she asked me how I was feeling about everything, and my response was "I hurt for you and seeing you go through all this." God has been good to us through it all, and we have seen our marriage strengthened as we have faced the ups and downs together as a family.

From Amanda

Our summer was definitely full and fun! We worked with four different teams and did lots of activities with the children and the youth. We visited local schools and donated books and sports equipment. We had clothing sales in three different neighborhoods. In between teams I would be out paying scholarships and picking my kids up from a local summer camp. We traveled to Colorado for my brother's wedding and had a vacation we never would have planned otherwise. So many fun times and good memories!

The end of the summer brought some hard moments for me personally. While we were in Colorado, we announced to my family that we were expecting our fourth and very excited as we had really prayed about whether or not to have one more. On August 1st, however, I had a miscarriage. After three successful pregnancies I did not expect this, and it was a rough experience to process. Even as I type this out the tears come easily. As I grieved the loss of our baby and all the expectations that come with a pregnancy, I was also ready to let go knowing I could not control what had happened. Running and playing ultimate frisbee have been great personal outlets for me over the years, so two weeks later I was back running with friends and playing ultimate. On August 22, however, at the end of an ultimate frisbee game I jumped up for a catch and upon landing tore my ACL. At first I wanted to believe it was not that serious, but the MRI showed otherwise. Fifteen years ago I had torn the same ACL so I remembered what that felt like. In September I had surgery here in Nicaragua to reconstruct my ACL and started doing physical therapy. Losing a baby and then my not being able to run, play sports and be active has been tough for me. And yet in times like these it is easy to lose oneself in thoughts of "poor me" or wondering why all this has happened. While I have definitely shed some tears and had those thoughts, I chose to believe that God is good and SO much bigger than my daily circumstances. I chose to seek God through all of this. I chose to see His presence in my daily life. And He has been faithful. God has shown Himself through Thomas as he has loved and supported me so much through these past four months. I have seen God through the blessing of my parents coming down to help me after the surgery. I have seen God through our church family and friends here in the form of prayers, visits, meals for our family and encouraging phone calls and emails. I have seen God in my children wanting to be there for me, wanting to understand how one just loses a baby and wanting to comfort me when I was in pain. Mostly, I have felt God's presence through a peace that quietly whispers to my heart, "Trust me. I love you. And I know what is best."

My knee surgery went well and I am healing well. It will be awhile until I run again, but I am back to walking for exercise and using a stationary bike. We are also excited to announce that we are pregnant again, and all seems to be going well. These last four months have been a real lesson in trusting God when circumstances are quite different than one expects.

Thanks for your continued support and prayers. May you know the peace of Christ this Christmas season!

Seeking Him for life,

Thomas, Amanda, Samantha, Anthony y Nicole Gutiérrez

Kingdom Point International PO Box 301471 Portland, OR 97294

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

