

March 2012

Dear Friends and Family,

**What a beautiful time of year!** In Nicaragua we are coming into the hottest time of the year. We are in the midst of our dry season, and in January and February it has been quite windy and even just a bit chilly. After living in Nicaragua for almost 10 years, my definition of chilly has become: not turning my fan on at night. Yet when March comes, everyone knows the heat is coming too. So the fans are back on at our house, and the kids are playing outside every afternoon. Below is a little bit of what life has been like for the past few months. Enjoy!

#### From Samantha

**After Christmas vacation, which was so much fun,** I came back to school to a new teacher. I really like my new teacher. "She plays with us and shows us how to do things." We are learning lots of Bible stories, how to write our names and many fun songs. When I come home from school, I like to teach my little brother, Anthony, all of the things that I am learning. I even take a light off of his stoplight if he does not behave; that is what they do at school if we do not listen or obey. On Valentine's Day we had a party in our class. I made cards with my mommy and gave them to the other kids in my class. I got to wear a pink shirt to school that day instead of my uniform. It was fun!

In January a group from Pennsylvania was here. I love having Bob, Bonnie, Lisa and Wendy come visit us. I really had fun meeting Charlotte and Marina; they played so much with me. While they were here, I had a really scary experience. I was walking to my room by myself to get something, and I saw the biggest scorpion I have ever seen. I went running to my mom screaming because I was so scared. Mommy says it is the biggest scorpion she has ever seen. It took me awhile to walk to my room by myself again.

#### From Anthony

**A couple of months ago I woke up one morning** to find the front half of our house taken over with boxes and hundreds of backpacks. Over the next week many people were in and out of our home putting things in the bags and stacking them in different places. I was trying to be helpful by moving some of the packed ones to different stacks, but everyone kept moving them back and my mom would send me outside to play. Finally one day they moved 350 of the bags over to the Ranchon. That day they let me help by putting a backpack into my little shopping cart and telling me to follow them. I love helping!!

My mom says that I am good little helper. At the bank I like to try and sign the forms. Whenever mom is trying to carry something, I grab one side and help carry it. And when she does a load of laundry, I love throwing the clothes into the washing machine; it's like shooting hoops. My favorite sport though is soccer. I love kicking a ball around. And I really love going to my papi's soccer practice with his team.

#### From Thomas

**For me 2012 started off normal with getting back to work** at Nicaragua Christian Academy as well as having teams here at the sports center. I really enjoy when teams come that we already know and have friendships with. I really feel like part of their team and that they are like family to us.

In February, though, I had one of the toughest experiences I have ever had; I lost one of my best friends. Friday, February 24th I went out to watch a soccer game with one of my best friends, Freddy. We do not get to hang out as much anymore because of our jobs and families, but we try to get together every once in awhile. We were really close friends growing up, and he was the best man in our wedding. That was the last night I got to hang out with him. We parted ways after the game and I went home. Freddy, however, met up with my younger brother at a gas station to hang out. They bought sodas and were sitting outside on the curb when two drugged-up guys pulled up on a motorcycle and pulled out a 9 millimeter to hold them up and steal their things. Accidentally, one of the guys pulled the trigger and it shot Freddy in the head. The doctors tried operating on him to save him, but he passed away the next day. It is hard for me to write about this. We often do not understand God's purposes in situations like these and often we get angry with God. But I know that things like this happen to good people, to our friends and our family. What impacted me the most was losing a best friend and the fact that he leaves behind a wife and two young girls. It's hard to understand how it must be for Lesbia, Freddy's wife, and his girls since he was such a part of their lives. I think about them often and wonder how the future will look for them without a husband and a father. I would really appreciate your prayers for Lesbia and her two daughters, Alexandra and Nathaly.



**From Amanda**

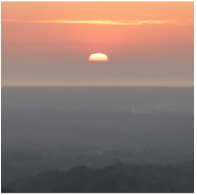
**This year got off to a running start with a team** from St Paul's Methodist Church in State College, PA. This church raises a majority of the money that funds the scholarship program so it is fitting that they are able to come in January to be a part of packing and distributing 598 backpacks and 73 preschool bags of school supplies. They also met five of the recently graduated high school students who will be receiving scholarships to go to college or attend technical courses. It is very exciting to be able to scholarship 44 university students in 2012!



We appreciated all of their hard work and the many sewing projects that were done with people in the community. In February we were blessed to work with a team from Maple Valley Presbyterian in WA. The projects we have been working on are laying a concrete driveway to the sports center entrance, fixing some of the old basketball court, building, painting and installing benches behind the soccer field and working on gates for the baseball stadium. It has been a busy couple of months.



We have definitely experienced some highs and lows in the last three months. For us it is always a high to be able to travel to California for Christmas and be able to see my family. We are thankful to God for continuing to provide airfare that we can afford. Another high for me was participating in a mini-triathlon in January. Some of my lows were having my car broken into while I was at school paying a scholarship and then a week or so later having my car break down and needing to overhaul the engine. Again we are grateful to God for His provision in times of need. Freddy's death, though, was definitely the toughest low. In Nicaragua whenever someone dies, a wake is held that evening. Family, friends, neighbors and friends of friends gather to mourn and support the family. I have been to numerous wakes in my years here in Nicaragua and this was by far the toughest one. It was really hard to see his wife who was holding it together so well but that I knew was struggling deeply with the tragedy that had just occurred in her life. Thomas and I have made a commitment to make sure that Freddy's girls' education is taken care of through the years. We will do that in his memory.



Seeking Him for life,

*Thomas, Amanda, Samantha y Anthony Gutierrez*