

March 2013



Dear Friends and Family,

We hope that this year has been full of blessings for you and your family. After a wonderful time with family over the holidays we were ready to get back in the swing of things here in Managua. Life has been quite full since January.



From Samantha

Over Christmas break I had SO much fun playing with my new baby cousin, Deiliana. I loved giving her toys and trying to make her smile. And then right before we left to come back to Nicaragua, Mommy gave us the best Christmas gift ever – we are going to have a baby of our own! I cannot wait to have a new little brother or sister. I am even trying to help pick out names. For now though I have to be patient because the baby will not be here until August.



It is not too hard to be patient, though, when there is so much else to do. In January Lisa and Barb came back with a team, and I was able to help them pack lots and lots of backpacks. I also went on a zip line with Mommy. Then I started gymnastic classes one afternoon a week at my school. And in March another team arrived, and they have stayed for 5 weeks. One of the girls gave me a brand new hair cut! Every Friday night they have hosted a youth night for the older youth in our neighborhood. I love those nights because one of my best friends, Hazel, comes to play with me while Mommy translates and Papi plays with all the youth. I have really enjoyed hanging out with this group, and I will miss them when they leave.



From Anthony

Guess what? My mommy has a baby in her tummy. To be honest I do not really understand how she keeps the baby there and why I cannot see the baby yet, but she keeps telling me that the baby will be here in August. Not that I have any idea when that is! What I do know is how to count to 10 on my fingers and that I can memorize everybody's names on the teams that come to work at the sports center. In January Bob and Bonnie came down with a 15-member team from their church. I memorized almost everyone's names, but mostly I liked tagging along with Bob, George, Greg and Kevin. Then in March a group of 11 people showed up, and they stayed for 5 weeks. I know them all by name and often in the morning after Sami has gone to school and Mommy is doing boring things like laundry, I head over to the sports center all by myself to see whom I can hang out with. One of the girls, Megan, is always asking me "How did you get so cute?" I do not know the answer to that one so I just tell her things like, "I just put my shoes on." They seem to find that very funny. What I love best is playing monster tag with Zachary!



The best part was that they all came to my birthday party. Mommy bought me a Spiderman piñata that was a full head taller than me. All of my cousins came to my party, and we broke the piñata, ate yummy food, and even had a water fight. It was a great day!



From Thomas

In the last couple of months I have continued running two soccer leagues for boys between 15 and 25 as well as helping out at where I work, the Nicaragua Christian Academy (NCA), with the elementary boys' soccer team. A couple of times I have driven my pickup truck over to our neighborhood and taken a group of younger boys to NCA to run a scrimmage game against the boys at the school. The boys from the neighborhood enjoy doing something different, and it is good playing experience for the boys from the school. My older soccer team continues to enjoy playing together though we have not done too well in the final championships. Oh well, winning is not everything!



One of the most special moments just recently was attending one of my good friend's university graduation. Raul was one of the students in Amanda's scholarship program. Since he studied Systems Engineering and focused on computers, he and I have become close friends over the years. I have helped him learn more about computers, and he has helped me do extra jobs at NCA in order to practice his skills.



When I am not working or at home with my family, you can often find me out at the sports center just hanging out with the guys. Many a day we pile into my truck and go out for a snack or we all head over to my house to hang out and watch a soccer game. Just the other night Amanda came home to find that I had invited eight guys over. We were cooking dinner and watching a soccer game. She does not seem to mind that we take over the house as long as she does not have to cook for everyone.





From Amanda

In our last letter I wrote “as we look to 2013 we know that God has a lot planned.” That has proven to be very true in these first couple of months. What we did not know at that moment was that it included a new baby! As both our children have mentioned above, we are expecting our third child in August and are very excited.



January is always a busy month as it is the end of summer here in Nicaragua and therefore, it is back-to-school season. There are many decisions to be made regarding scholarships for youth especially at the college level, and there is the annual plan to order enough school supplies for anywhere between 500-600 backpacks. The great part is that while every year the program seems to grow, at the same time it also becomes easier. In the years of living in Nicaragua I have learned that so many of the women who live around us are more than willing to help me out in little ways. This year I had three different women collecting report cards from children in the neighborhood so that I could go through each one to create my backpack list. Over the years the families have learned that I only accept children who have passed all of their classes and that I have definitely gotten better at catching the tricks like using whiteout over bad grades or the school year. This was the first year that I did not receive any faked or changed report cards.



In January we always host a team from St Paul’s Methodist Church from State College, PA. This team is such a blessing to us. In part because they come and help pack all 650 backpacks! And also because over the years many members have returned year after year and because of that we feel like we are welcoming old friends every time they return. This year two of the ladies who love to sew decided that it would be a fun treat to sew little drawstring bags for all the preschool-aged children who would be receiving school supplies. We hosted a sewing class and had about 13 women from the neighborhood help us sew the 65 preschool bags. After finishing the bags the ladies were then able to make for themselves a purse and a little pouch for carrying change or makeup. Overall, it was a great way to work side by side on a project that would benefit children from the community. At the end of their time with us we delivered all of the backpacks to the children in three different communities.



This year the scholarship program continues to focus more and more on college scholarships.

Currently, there are 49 university students in the program with another 8 waiting to complete their final year. College in Nicaragua is a five-year experience with four years of classes and one final course that is focused specifically in the area of study. The final course can often cost two to three times the normal yearly cost and because of that, many students have a hard time saving the money to be able to finish. The final course does not begin until a certain number of students have registered and therefore, many of the students to whom I have given scholarships find themselves waiting for other students to save their money before they can actually take the course. Can you imagine having to wait a year or two before being able to finish your degree to graduate?



At the end of February we welcomed a group of 10 students from Omaha, Nebraska who are part of a program called IBEX through Lifegate Church. They are here for 5 weeks living and working alongside us in order to experience missions firsthand. They have been a fun group to get to know, and our children have really enjoyed hanging out with them throughout the day. They have done lots of painting and gardening around the sports center. In the afternoons they are often out playing with the children from the community or running the library and offering different crafts for the kids to do. One day a week they have offered a free beauty salon offering haircuts, manicures and pedicures to the ladies and girls in the community. My prayer is that they have enjoyed their time with us in Nicaragua and at the same time that God has stretched each one of them and inspired them for their futures.



Seeking Him for life,

Thomas, Amanda, Samantha y Anthony Gutiérrez



Eastside Development

PO Box 301471 Portland, OR 97294

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