

October 2016

Dear Friends and Family,

Greetings from rainy Nicaragua! The rain is great as it cools things down, turns everything green and allows crops to grow which many people here rely on. These past four months have been busy and full!

First some highlights from our family. The biggest one was on June 11 when Sofia Amanda Gutierrez was born at 2:40 a.m. on her due date! Anthony graduated in June from kindergarten and is very excited to have started first grade this fall. Sami continues to be involved in gymnastics but also began swimming in the Nica Nadadores club that is using the pool at El Salero as their home pool. Nicole is growing up so quickly and started her first year of preschool in August. Thomas continues to have plenty of work at the Nicaragua Christian Academy and enjoys running a soccer league on Saturdays where he can share his faith, be a role model to younger men and at the same time enjoy his favorite sport, soccer. I am doing well and enjoying being a mom of four especially since Sofia has been a very happy baby so far!

From the scholarship program, we were blessed to have a young gal named Ana come visit this past summer. For a Girl Scout badge she raised \$2500 to go towards backpacks. It was fun to have her come and see the children who will receive some of those backpacks next year. Usually I use the list of backpack recipients to help me decide whom to offer scholarships to for college. One of my favorite parts of managing this program is paying for a college student's final year. Life in Nicaragua is not easy for many families, and as a young adult there is a lot of pressure from family to get a job, help out around the home, contribute financially, etc. and therefore, not continue studying after high school. Finding families that are supportive and understand the benefit of a college education for their children is sometimes difficult. For all of those reasons I am very proud when students make it to their final year. This year four students are in the process of their final coursework. Winston Pichardo, the son of a single mom and the older of two boys, is one of them. His mom works odd jobs like washing clothes and cleaning to make ends meet. There are times though when it has been difficult for her to find work. I do not know her income but in comparing with others who work similar jobs, I would guess she makes about \$80 to \$150 a month. When Winston graduated from high school he received a full scholarship to a well-known university in Managua to study law. However, this university is two bus rides away and would cost him about \$23 a month in transportation plus all the costs of copies, books and school supplies. In 2012, I agreed to help him out, and he began to come by monthly to pick up money for transportation. Over the years he has consistently brought me his grades and kept me up to date on his progress. This past year there were extra costs involved in graduating and finishing his final project. He was very thankful for the help that the scholarship program provided. One day he showed me a 200 page notebook and with pride explained that this was what he had been working on for months to present as his final project for his law degree. He is thrilled to be done and looks forward to utilizing his degree to work, and at the same time has told me that he plans to go on to graduate school.

On another front this past summer we enjoyed working with two wonderful short-term teams from Texas and North Carolina. Both teams consisted of high schoolers and some of their parents. One of the teams hosted an indoor soccer tournament for the local youth. The boys from the surrounding neighborhoods love these kind of activities. When not playing in the soccer tournament, the team was busy helping around the sports center doing projects and playing with the kids. In the afternoons the moms on the team taught a baking class to women from the neighborhood. The women learned how to make a couple different kinds of cookies and then took some home to their families. The second team consisted of many girls that play together on a soccer team so they were eager to find high school girls here to play sports with. In Nicaragua, however, it is not as common for girls to be involved in sports. Thankfully, Thomas knew a couple of girls in our neighborhood who play soccer for the local public high school, and we invited them to come and spend time with this team of girls. Two afternoons they played soccer games, one afternoon they did manicures and pedicures together, and the final afternoon the girls shared an afternoon in the pool. Both teams shared their faith through personal testimonies and Bible stories with the kids at the feeding program and with the older youth during soccer and at youth night events. Overall, it was a great time with both of these teams!

Seeking Him for life,

Thomas, Amanda, Samantha, Anthony, Nicole and Sofia Gutiérrez

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