



Dear Friends and Family,



It has taken me over a month to write this letter. I often write while nursing a super cute baby, but there is an adorable two year old who loves to have books read to her, an imaginative five year old who enjoys telling me about her day in Kindergarten, an athletic eight year old who keeps me up to date on the UEFA soccer league and an energetic eleven year old who always has a new idea to share with me! So you can imagine that my days are full and that it can be hard to find time to sit and write. We do apologize for not having written in a couple of months. With all of the civil unrest going on, we really should have communicated more. Thankfully, we continue to be safe where we live. Aside from people seizing vacant land, occasional looting, and some small protests, this side of Managua has been less affected overall. Of course, the reality of what is going on in Nicaragua definitely continues to affect our lives, and we pray daily for peace and justice.



Looking back at the first half of 2018, we wanted to give an update of what we have been up to.



In January and February we focused on the scholarship and backpack program. Without a team to help us pack up 600+ backpacks I asked for help from girls in the neighborhood, my Bible study friends and Thomas' family. Everyone was very willing to help. Thomas' family came one Sunday afternoon, and once they understood my system they were in a rhythm and didn't want to stop. We decided to order 12 pizzas for everyone so that we could keep on packing into the evening. We all had so much fun that we decided it was a new family tradition! Handing out backpacks has always been quite a feat, but this year I had so much help that we came up with a much more effective system and it went quite fast.



In February Word of Life began moving their offices over to the sports center. They were also busy remodeling some of the buildings to make them better for their ministry needs. By the beginning of March they were fully moved in and ready to start an exciting part of their ministry - the English for Life program. This program teaches young adults English by immersion as well as focusing on the students' walk with Christ and developing ministry skills. The students live at the center from Monday through Friday and must speak only English from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Word of Life brings in fluent English-speaking teachers as volunteers to help teach the classes; however in March they did not have enough teachers to start the program so they asked me if I wanted to teach. I said yes and for the next six weeks I taught English to four young adults. I really enjoyed the experience of teaching as well as getting to know my students. In April the new volunteer teachers arrived and started teaching the second six-week term. All was going so well. Little did any of us know what April 19th would bring.



We have felt for years that Nicaragua is like a time bomb ticking away until someday something would set off the society to protest the dictatorship that has been growing all these years. Power in the hands of few is a scary thing, and living here we are witnesses to the atrocities that some will commit to hold on to that power. As I type this letter we are in the fifth month of protests and civil unrest throughout the country against the Ortega-Murillo regime. There is no way to know how all of this will end, but we are committed to staying here and continuing to do what we do. Thomas feels strongly that he should continue in his job at the Nicaragua Christian Academy. And while many of the university students that I scholarship are facing difficulties in being able to study because of the situation, I am committed to helping them continue if it's possible.





One of my university students finally received his degree in the midst of all this chaos. He had actually finished his coursework and graduated last Fall, but for some reason the actual sealed paper proving his degree in veterinary medicine was not ready until May. He was so excited when he received it that he came by my house on his way home! Many university students have been involved in the protests, and some universities have been used as bases for student protest groups. Because of this many universities have been under attack and have had to close down and go to online classes if possible.



Amidst all of the tension of this civil unrest, we were excited to be expecting our fifth child. Many people were praying for the details of the birth of this little one, and we feel so blessed by how God answered those prayers. Alexander Thomas Gutierrez was born on June 21st at 1:04 am. That particular evening there was no violence in Managua. On our drive to the hospital at 9:30 pm we missed the turn to the hospital and had to turn around at a roundabout that for the last couple of weeks had been a location of violence as pro-government groups tried to take it from the protestors. That night it was totally calm, neither side was present-- just one guy with a gun guarding a stack of large concrete stones. Alexander has been a blessing to us all, and it has been so fun to see how each of our older children has reacted to having a little brother.



My sister and her family were planning to come in June, but the more she and I analyzed the situation here we both agreed that it was too risky for them to come and it just wouldn't be the fun trip we were all hoping it would be. My parents also had plans to come in July to meet their new grandson. Since they have been here before and did not care about doing fun things around the city or traveling to other areas, we assured them that once at our home all would be fine. Thankfully, they were still willing to make the trip! We had a wonderful three weeks with them here. I know my kids were very excited for their visit since many of our missionary friends left for the summer months, some for planned trips and others were told to leave by their missions. Many other school friends have left the country as well for the time being.



When I picked my parents up at the airport and as we drove across Managua, I remember saying, "well you can now cross off 'visit a country on the brink of civil war' on your bucket list!" My dad said that was not on his bucket list :). It's not on mine either. Honestly, these last four months have been some of the most emotionally draining months I've ever lived through. I've never checked the news daily like I did April through August. I've never had to think about how much of this violence and deaths we share with our kids. Thomas and I have never had to sit down and talk about what it would take for us to up and leave until now. And I don't think I've ever realized how much I love Nicaragua.



Please be praying for Nicaragua. For peace and justice. For an end to the repression and violence. For those in prison being accused of terrorism when all they have done is protest peacefully. For a good resolution to come soon.



Thank you for reading all of our news, for supporting us in prayer and financially and for caring!

Praying for peace,

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



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