

Dear Friends and Family,

What a year this has been! From packing backpacks in January to paying scholarships in February and then the first case of COVID-19 in Nicaragua in March to 9 weeks of online school with four kids and a 20 month old through April and May, I'm just glad we made it to summer! I apologize for not having written earlier, but honestly this year has been quite unique as I'm sure it has been for each of you.

In January we packed 763 school supplies bags and backpacks with the help of Thomas' family and handed them all out over a weekend with the help of many individuals from the neighborhood. As much as I still miss the St Paul's team that used to help with all of this, I love how many Nicaraguan friends are willing to give their time to help me out. Kathy August was also here in January to visit us and see all of the kids she scholarships. It was a wonderful time for us to reconnect. As the Nicaraguan school year started in February, I was off paying scholarships and starting to pay for 14 new university students. This year there are a total of 44 university students being scholarshiped and 9 who are finishing their degrees. Please keep students in your prayers as many struggle to do online classes without the resources like computers and consistent internet access.

As COVID-19 spread around the world, we were all anticipating its arrival in Nicaragua but were unsure as to how the government planned to react or take preventive measures. Unfortunately, their reaction has been to do the opposite of many of the recommended procedures. On March 18 the first case was diagnosed here, and the Saturday before that the government hosted a large march through old downtown Managua and called it "Love in times of COVID-19." Honestly, it was hard to believe it was real. To date the government claims there have only been 3672 cases and 116 deaths. However, an independent medical group has reported at least 8755 suspected cases and 2487 deaths based on information they receive from medical staff and families. Testing for COVID-19 is controlled strictly by the government, and from what we have gathered one has to be quite sick in order to be tested. Doctors have been fired for speaking out against the government's terrible handling of this pandemic. Many companies and schools are forced to create their own protocols for how to deal with employees, students and clients in order to protect them from getting and/or spreading the virus. It really is every man for himself.

Online classes were one of the most stressful times for me personally. Overnight I became a teacher/guide for my four children in PreK 1, 1st grade, 4th grade and 6th grade. Add to that our 20 month old who was delighted to have his brother and sisters home but could not understand why they were so busy on the computers all the time. After a couple of weeks we found a good schedule that allowed me some one-on-one time with each of them. It was not easy, and I don't think I've ever been more ready and excited for summer break! Our summer has been great all things considered. We fill our days with swimming, playing games, singing, cooking, playing outside and just being together as a family. There are rough moments for sure, but it's been special to watch God maturing each of my kids at the age they are. I know God has been working in me too so I pray for each one of you that reads this - May God be continually working in you bringing you closer to His perfection, making you more like Jesus every day!

With love,

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

