
The Word from Nicaragua

July 2006 Newsletter (Aaron Pick)



HOLA!

For those of you who saw me in May when I was back in California, you probably noticed that I had picked up a crazy cough that stayed with me for over a month. So, what does that have to do with San Juan de Oriente, Nicaragua? Well, every time that the mosquitoes get really bad here, a truck comes through town and fumigates the entire village as it drives down the streets. Maybe it's the little bit of American citizen left in me, but it just freaks me out to see a truck cruising down the road with a huge tube that can blast out enough bug spray to make it over each house and into everyone's backyards (imagine a snow making machine pumping out Raid). I don't tend to carry a gas mask with me through town, so I decided my best option was to try and outrun the truck as it headed toward me. Maybe I'm getting old, but I wasn't fast enough, and I ended up getting blasted right as I attempted to run into my neighbor's house. Anyway, maybe it's coincidence, but the cough started right after that and now everyone laughs at me when they see the fumigation truck coming my way.

WORK TRIPS

Seventeen people participated in our latest international work trip to Nicaragua, which included a fifteen person team from The River Church Community (San Jose, CA) and a two person preview team from Emmaus Church Community (Lincoln, CA). These trips are a yearly highlight for me and many kids in the community (they ask me everyday when the groups are coming back). This year's trip included a kids' program in the mornings, an afternoon sports program, and a block party for the entire community to end the ten day trip. Like last year, the team was amazing, and succeeded in pulling off a daily children's program for 375 kids and a sports camp that probably pulled in a couple hundred more. Some of the highlights for me included Dan McClure (our games leader) showing almost 400 kids how to juggle scarves and Matt Miller (our music leader) playing guitar and singing songs in Spanish (even though he doesn't speak it himself!).



Local youth fill the auditorium for the kids' camp

I'LL NEVER WATCH FINDING NEMO AGAIN

So, how can I mention a block party without going into the details? I'm no veteran to block parties, but it is safe to say that San Juan de Oriente had never seen anything like this in its history. To start things off, we



The party tractor!

rented a truck with speakers on the roof that went around town advertising the event for two hours. We had no way of knowing how many people would actually show up since nothing like this had ever happened before (although I'm sure that handing out 600 fliers had something to do with the frenzy). To top it off, we also rented a "party tractor" which drove around town playing music while pulling passenger carts behind it. I'm not sure if there is any way to give you a realistic image of this, but picture a tractor trying to make its way over speed bumps while blasting merengue music with a solid 80 kids on board (they told me it had a maximum capacity of 50...which I'm sure has since been revised). Once the actual party started, which included everything

from folkloric dancing to a puppet show and even a movie of the town, the kids kept waiting for the evening's last event – the lowering of a giant, golf cart-sized Nemo piñata. Let me start by saying that most of you are probably smarter than I am and have already realized the mass chaos that is about to ensue as I

continue this story. By this point, we had more than 1,000 people at the party (you sort of lose count once the entire town shows up). I'll spare everyone the details, but once the piñata made its way down, there were layers of kids diving into the pile, Nemo was in small pieces, and we had work trip volunteers somewhere underneath it all. Basically, imagine an entire elementary school (or two) rushing a piñata at once and you've got a pretty good idea of what happened. So, no, not such a good idea. Why do I incriminate myself like this? I guess mainly because nobody got hurt, but also because it was amazing to see the work trip volunteers (those who weren't under the pile) come to the rescue. And while Nemo is no longer my favorite fish, it was actually somewhat cathartic to see how the town showed their support of our team and the event, despite the crazy ending.

CALIFORNIA BOUND

It has now been three years since my first trip to Nicaragua, and I'm actually on the plane heading back to California as I write this letter. During my stay in San Juan de Oriente, I've seen the dream for LA VIDA's educational community center become a reality, the formation of a girls' soccer league in town, and many



The educational community center

volunteers from the US come down to be a part of LA VIDA Education's ongoing projects. In many ways, I fell in love with the town of San Juan de Oriente, and they adopted me as one of their own. It is humbling to know that I was given the trust of a community, and I am sure that this won't really hit me until I have been away for some amount of time. As many of you know, I will be heading back to the US for the next two years to go to graduate school. I feel incredibly fortunate, not only to be going back to school, but to simply be in a place in life where this next step feels right. I'm sure it will be a crazy transition (uhh...no more rice and beans, daily firecrackers, or bulls running down the streets), but starting in August I will begin the MBA program at Berkeley's Haas School of Business. This is sure to be a huge learning experience for me,

and one that I hope will ultimately help LA VIDA Education grow and mature in ways that would not otherwise be possible. Berkeley has a great nonprofit program and some amazing professors in this area, so I'm hoping to pick up some things I probably should have learned three years ago.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR LA VIDA EDUCATION?

So, I imagine some of you are asking, "What happens to LA VIDA while you are in school?" Fortunately, this is something we have been anticipating over the past year, and I feel like it is actually a healthy step in the organization's development and long term sustainability. For example, we are currently in the process of obtaining NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) status in Nicaragua to go along with our nonprofit status in the United States. This carries several benefits, some of which include more credibility in Nicaragua, the establishment of a Nicaraguan board of directors, and an easier way of purchasing property and paying employees in San Juan de Oriente. My involvement with LA VIDA will be limited to a role on the board and overseeing the financials of the company, although I am planning to return to Nicaragua in January to confirm our NGO status and purchase property for a new educational community center (museum, sports complex, art/dance/music programs, library, tech center, and a children's learning center). We also plan to hire a Nicaraguan director in January to oversee the existing educational community center and the two other employees who currently run the programs. I want to be very clear that your donations have paid for the center, its employees, and all of our projects (and will make future projects possible), so please consider making a consistent monthly donation to our ongoing programs. We cannot operate without your support.

I will periodically continue to send out newsletters to let you know what is happening. For those who have shown an interest in helping to buy land for the new center, I will do my best to keep you involved in this process. Thanks for journeying with me on this project, and I look forward to letting you know how things are going in the future. As always, feel free to email me at aaron@lavidaeducation.org with any questions.

Saludos,
Aaron