
The Word from Nicaragua

March 2006 Newsletter (Aaron Pick)



HOLA!

I've made it a tradition of starting these letters off with stories about the insane amounts of noise in San Juan de Oriente or ways in which I've hurt myself since the previous newsletter, so I figure why change things up now? Since I won't be talking about the noise, you can guess where I'm going with this. After you've lived here a while, you start to realize that your body has picked up some extra sense that tells you how to keep



yourself from getting hurt while walking down the street. Maybe mine's only half a sense or something, because it goes into hibernation more often than it should. Anyway, before I get into all the ways that you can be seriously injured here just walking down the street (I think I'll just do a top ten list on this), I'll just say that I'm actually surprised that it took me two years to encounter the latest mishap. I was walking down the sidewalk at night in Granada (about 30 minutes from San Juan de Oriente). The street lights on the entire block had gone out, so I figured (like most rational people, right?) that walking down the sidewalk would be safer than taking my chances by walking down the middle of the street in the dark and getting hit by a bike (if you'd like...insert whatever animal you want for "bike"). Anyway, bad idea. Don't walk on the sidewalks in the dark. I fell into a giant pothole (that holds the water meter) and came about as close as you can to breaking a leg. It's one thing to write about the potholes here, but it's

another thing to actually see some of them (yes, manhole is a very appropriate name). Enjoy the pictures!

The culprit!

THE TOP FIVE WAYS TO SERIOUSLY INJURE YOURSELF IN NICARAGUA

1. Getting run over by a taxi (look both ways before you cross the street, then do it a again)
2. Getting run over by a bike (generally they have two people on them, so double the pain)
3. Falling into a manhole (see picture to the left, enough said)
4. Walking into barb wire clotheslines (if you're over six feet tall, this is probably number one)
5. Getting kicked by a horse (pretty much any animal can hurt you here, so I just picked one)



Don't fall in, you may never get out!

In case you're wondering, yes, I could have come up with ten quite easily, but why make this list long when I'm trying to recruit people to come down here on work trips. Did I fail to mention that Nicaragua is often cited as being the safest country in Central America? I'm not kidding.

WHERE'S WALDO? JUST ASK AROUND, YOU'LL FIND HIM.

So, I think I mentioned in previous newsletters that street addresses don't really exist here. My first address was "From the Catholic church, one block south, and one block west." Surprisingly, this seems to work pretty well, but I finally decided to get a P.O. box last year since it's sort of hard to put "yellow house, one block from the mayor's office, on the corner" on a business card. Not surprisingly, locating a person in Nicaragua follows this same idea. Last week, I was looking for someone to paint the educational community center. I was told that there was a guy by the name of Roger Lopez living in Masaya (a town of maybe 40,000). Sure enough, I showed up and started asking around, and fifteen minutes later I found my way by

foot to Roger's house, without having any idea of where he lived previously. It's really pretty amazing. I needed to talk to another painter, so this time I went to Diriomo (a town of maybe 10,000), and asked for a guy who had been recommended by the name of Isaias Moraga. Same story, ten minutes later I was at his house. He wasn't home, and nobody in the house knew his cell phone number, but hey, the fact that you can just find someone by asking around is pretty incredible.

FIRST AID, ANYONE?

I'm not sure how this happens, but I seem to have a safety theme going here now. In February, a friend of mine named Elliott Robinson (yes, many of you know him) came to Nicaragua to teach first aid classes to youth in San Juan de Oriente. Elliott's a firefighter and thrives on emergency situations, so it was cool to see him pass his knowledge on to others in the town. During the afternoons, he taught physical geography classes at the local high school. We've had great reception from the kids here, and at least now everyone knows how hurricanes form and a little bit more about the avian flu. For some reason, the bird flu theme was a big hit. Could it be that there are probably as many chickens as people in town?

WE'VE MOVED

Earlier this month, we moved the educational community center to a new location in the middle of San Juan de Oriente. Our old location was tiny (as in 500 square feet), and it became clear after the first week of opening that it was too small. Finding an empty building (or even an empty lot to build on for that matter) in the middle of town has been almost impossible. The new place is almost twice the size of our old spot, so that has made life a little easier for everyone who studies, plays, or works in the center. Imagine fitting 50 people into a 500 square foot room at the same time. Yeah, fun for like five minutes and then it's just crazy. The new building is already packed, so our search for a large chunk of land continues. The goal is to find a location that will allow us to include recreational facilities (soccer, basketball, etc.), a pottery museum to financially sustain all projects and employees, art/dance/music programs, a technology center, library, and children's learning area. Of course, you have to start small in the beginning, so we're continuing to learn how to best run the library, kids' learning area, and art center before taking the next step.

WELCOMING MIKE HOGAN TO THE BOARD

In February, LA VIDA Education added Mike Hogan to our board of directors. Mike is the Compassion Manager at The River Church Community, and besides being an all around talent, he has an amazing way of being able to help people learn to use their resources and abilities to serve others (how else do you get the title of Compassion Manager?). Mike's passion for social justice is contagious and his approach to life is totally inspiring, so we feel very fortunate to have him on board.

HEY, AARON, WHERE'S OUR MONEY GOING?

I sent out a 2005 Year in Review to everyone who donated over the past year (and to everyone else I thought might be interested) which highlighted our projects for 2005. If you did not get one of these in the mail, and would like one sent to you, please let me know. Putting this review together was helpful for me because it made me realize how much we've branched out since our first construction project in 2004. While the educational community center continues to serve as the hub for what we do, many of our highlights came from projects that were not originally on our agenda a few years ago (like the girls' soccer league, work trip volunteers teaching English classes at the high school, musical instruments and outfits for folkloric dance groups, etc.). Thanks again for all your interest and participation in what we're doing here.

Saludos,
Aaron