

**Nicaragua Mission Trip
June 8-18, 2009**



**A Collection of Emails
from
Cathy Goodman**

**With contributions from
Christie Ritter and Abe Gonzalez**



Somoto is the destination for the Nicaragua Mission

History of the Nicaragua Mission

Sunday, June 7, 2009

Hi Everyone!

I am busy getting ready for the Nicaragua Mission trip that starts next week. I will be sending you E-mails from beautiful downtown Somoto!

Wow, thinking back over the nine years of our mission and the eleven groups that have gone, I am amazed by what God has done and continues to do! I was reading about the miracle of the loaves and fishes just yesterday and it got me to thinking about our Nicaragua Project's history. In it, God has taken a tiny loaf and fish and has continued to multiply it. (Doesn't that just sound like God!) In 2000 my husband John Goodman and native Nicaraguan Pastor Abe Gonzalez from Greeley, along with nurse Arlene Chacon, went down to see if there was a way they could help people there. They thought they would be giving music instruction. Little did they know what God really had in mind! After meeting lay pastors running services out of doors in intense sun and torrential rain, John and Abe decided a church was needed in Caulculi, near Somoto, and one was built over the course of the next three years. Arlene was in tears after telling a family their son was dying from lack of a \$10 injection that was not even available and that would have saved his life...and the medical mission was started as well. While building the church, people were seen living in mud under plastic and sticks and the house building was started. After our trip this year, a total of 24 houses will have been built by us! For several years, we have been putting roofs on shacks as well to help keep people for whom we cannot build a house dry. Five years ago, two members of the group noted how much the children around the house construction sights liked to color pictures, and voila....a Vacation Bible School was started.

I do have to admit that sometimes the multiplying of the loaves and fishes happens in more than mysterious ways. Three years ago when we were there, we were bummed out because we could not start the building of a mother's house for pregnant women like we had planned due to problems with the land. It had to be started later, in our absence. As a result of this "problem", however, we were open to a proposal for a children's project to help raise children out of poverty that was presented to us by people with whom we had built a relationship. This year we look forward to seeing their first building of Niños y Niñas del Futuro (Children of the future) built with funds we left them last year and seeing the faces of the 120 children they are already starting to help!

When our medicine was confiscated by customs for three days last year, we were devastated. We met Dr. Daniel Mendiola and the impoverished nursing students from remote villages in the process of retrieving it, and the support of nursing students was initiated. Those customs agents never knew they were part of God's multiplication plans!

Last year, when Justin Dirkes was given \$25 at a Lutheran youth gathering and asked to multiply it, he decided to have a bowl-a-thon to raise money to give scholarships to children in Niños y Niñas del Futuro so that they could attend school and be given a chance to rise out of poverty, and now there is a scholarship program in which people are sponsoring 18 children to go to school! God certainly has mysterious ways! The miracle of loaves and fishes is not over yet, I am sure, and it is with great anticipation that I will be seeing how God distributes and multiplies them this year!

Please pray for God's guidance and safety for each of the 23 of us on this trip and pray that we will be open to whatever means He multiplies those loaves and fishes...

In Christ, Cathy



Surrounded by her family, several of whom have Down's syndrome, Flora cried as she remembered trying to keep her homeless family dry with cardboard when it rained. She now has a house we built in 2008.

Volunteers arrive in Nicaragua – First stop is Managua

Monday, June 8, 2009

As usual, I do not know this key board! We arrived safe and sound in Managua without any hitches. Actually, all of you arrived because each of you have supported us in some way...with prayers, donations of goods and money, words of encouragement, etc. God has already been with us. Kevin Kelley found us alternate transportation when the church van was leaking brake fluid. We got through customs without anything being taken, and all the flights went well. Tomorrow we travel to Somoto! Bless you all for your support and prayers. Until I get to a computer again!

In Christ,
Cathy



Some of the people we hope to help with homes.

A Busy and Meaningful Day in Somoto

Tuesday, June 9, 2009

Hello,

It is difficult to find the words to describe what we saw today. I have seen and been in a number of plastic and stick homes that were depressing, but never, never have I ever seen anything approaching the horrendous conditions of the three homes of the families for whom we are building new ones this year. Slick mud over sharp rocks made walking between the so called homes on the very narrow path treacherous. Every day the children have to negotiate each of their steps on it. There was insufficient plastic to protect anyone from the elements, sanitary facilities were minimal, and there really was no place to sleep other than atop a pile of trashy items. There is no way on that narrow path to even get the distance to take any picture of what we saw, and any picture does not begin to tell the story of the horrendous conditions these three families are living in. It was like walking 10 feet below the surface of a garbage dump. What a difference a simple brick home will make.

On a positive note, there was a celebration for us today put on by the children's project, Children of the Future. Marta, who a number of you heard speak at Bethlehem this year, led the celebration. They expressed over and over the key role we have played supporting the project and how vital it is to the welfare of the 120 children they currently serve. Many children are finding hope in their lives as they gather and feel the love and care of the women running the project and join in praising God and finding out about His love for them. In addition, they are receiving psychological and educational support and soon will start learning computer skills, thanks to the donations of computers!

Flora, a mother and grandmother to the three children with Downs Syndrome for whom we built a home last year, wept so much she had to stop speaking as she described during one of the presentations how she had suffered trying to find any shelter for the three under her care. She often tried to protect her family by trying to find cardboard to protect from the downpours and hot sun. She wept as she handed me a letter of gratitude.

The celebration was held in the wonderful building of the children's project. Donations paid for the construction of the building last year. They used many volunteers and construction students to be able to build it with the funds we gave them. They are using it not only for young children, but for older ones as well. A number of the older ones have been in gangs, but they are finding hope and caring from adults there and some are moving out of them. The scholarship program, which is part of the children's project, was also celebrated in a grand way.

Two city officials were there to present their support of the project as well and thank us for all we do for the people of their city.

Whatever your role has been in supporting the work here, you are making a tremendous difference in people's lives.

In Christ,
Cathy



From unimaginable living conditions (above) to new, clean, dry homes such as these (below).



Travel to Sabanas to Provide Medical Care

Wednesday, June 10, 2009

Today we traveled in an old school bus over a dirt road for an hour and a half to Sabanas, a remote village. When the people need hospital care, they cannot receive it because they cannot travel down to Somoto. They cannot walk those miles on the dirt road and they cannot even ride a horse, so they have to stay in the village. One of the nurses we are helping in the nurse's project helped us! She will help provide medical care in the village after she graduates. We saw 119 patients. The one that moved me the most was nine years of age and the size of a four year old. He obviously had brain damage. Worms are likely one of the causes, since they cause malnutrition and poor growth. I explained a number of times to mothers how very, very important it is to have everyone in the family de-wormed and the damage worms due to both body and brain growth. Then we gave them the medication!

Others moved me as well. One woman had a ten inch long, 5 inch wide open sore on her lower leg due to varicose veins bursting open. We did not have stockings to help the veins, but were able to give her dressings. A woman 83 years of age and bent over needed a walker. She looked so depressed. After she was given lessons with a walker we had brought along, she beamed! What a joy to see her.

The dentist pulled 62 teeth! In a busy week, he may pull 10 in an entire week. Those people now will not have infection throughout their body. It has been a good day.

Tomorrow at 7:30 AM Pastor Abe and I are meeting with Marta and Marcio of the children's project to discuss the setting up of the scholarship program with a new account, as we can no longer use that of the mayor as we did before. We will discuss the recipients of the scholarships. More tomorrow! Thank you all so much for your encouragement and letters. Due to time constraints, I may not answer all, but each is very much valued!

In Christ,
Cathy

Another Clinic in a Small Mountain Community

Thursday, June 11, 2009

Hello Everyone!

This is my seventh trip here and I have been at numerous clinics...but today's was the largest ever. Over 400 patients were seen for medical and dental care and to receive glasses. We worked in a very poor community in the mountains. The crowds reminded me of the scripture that talked about people crowding Jesus and wanting to be healed. Worms were rampant in the patients, and we went to the small pharmacy in town to buy more medication. (Thank you for those donations!) In fact, we had to buy more of every medicine and now are out of almost everything! We will be hitting the Somoto pharmacies for sure. In two days, we have used up the 9000 plus ibuprophen that were donated due to all the pain the people feel from worms, colds, and working hard to carry items, wash, and cook tortillas.

Carol, who along with Elaine is fitting glasses, said there are numerous touching stories of people who are receiving them. She told me one. A man in his eighties came to get glasses. He was aggressive and pushing through the crowd, even between small children. Finally, Carol told him that he would be seen but had to wait his turn because someone could get hurt. He left, but came back later doing the same thing! When Carol was able to at last see him, she found out he has been a farmer all his life. He felt he could have done better in life if he had been able to see well. He could not even see the rows of his crops, but somehow had managed to hold things up very close and learn to read. He had never had the means to get glasses. When Carol found the correct pair for him, he became overjoyed and his total demeanor changed. She gave him a paper and he could not believe print could be so clear. He was thrilled that at last he would be able to see the rows he had planted and check his crops without getting a plant within inches of his face. He was a new person!

Because of your support, differences are being made in people's lives!

In Christ,
Cathy

A Third Clinic, The Start of House Construction, The Blessings of Scholarships

Friday, June 12, 2009

Hí Everyone!

We had another clinic at La Playa today and saw only 150 patients!

One of the wonderful things working here is working WITH and not just FOR the people. From the beginning, many have helped us. To start the house construction requires a lot of work on the part of people here. Materials were purchased with money we sent ahead and by the time we got here, one house was nearly ready for a roof already. This is just what we wanted to have done! Since it takes two months to build one, we never see a house finished. This year, there is that possibility! Two other homes were about one third done. That gives a lot of work for our construction crew to do, which is mainly helping set rebar and setting bricks. The ex mayor Marcio has worked with us for several years. He provided a translator for the site who is providing a lot of time for the workers to communicate with each other. In the clinics, we have several women we know very well helping us organize the patients, keep order, translate, etc. For the first few days, a pharmacist came to help. Others are working to help us have the scholarships distributed every month. The idea for the Children Project is theirs, not ours, and they are running it. The same with the nursing student project.

There is so much joy to return here and receive hugs and greetings from those we know! A 13 year old who is with us was happily surprised when so many at the construction site remembered him and greeted him heartily!

Now, for scholarships...There is an 18 year old whose mother died when she was young. Her father and his family abandoned her, and she has grown up with her grandmother, who has not been able to send her to school for many years. She wants a scholarship so she can finish grammar school, and she is very intelligent! Due to Justin Dirkes, a youth himself, and his tremendous bowl a thon to raise scholarship money, she will be able to go!

Blessings to all, Cathy



Scholarship recipients
and their families

Thoughts About Hunger, Clean Water, Aches and Pains and Abundance

Saturday, June 13, 2009

Yes, it is Saturday morning, but I woke up thinking....I was first thinking about food. There are numerous people we have seen in the clinic who have sharp stomach pain under their rib cage that gets better when they eat. When you have to go a long time truly hungry, the stomach eats itself! Yesterday we were surprised to receive our prepared lunch containing a tilapia..an entire fish ...fried scales and all, hard and crisp. We moaned and gathered them up. We had no place to eat in private, and a boy looked longingly the entire time at our food boxes. Later, he was able to share a fish. I thought about Marta who came in March to speak to us. When she was in our house, she broke into tears when I opened my refrigerator. She had been to Miami a number of times in the past, but she cried remembering the first time her aunt opened her refrigerator and asked her what she wanted to eat. She is "middle class in Somoto, but said that her family still has some days they have very little to eat, yet they go to the Children's Project, sing and praise God, and are happy. If anyone here has a refrigerator, which very few do, it contains water and nothing else.

Speaking of water, I was thinking about that too. We have seen hundreds with parasites. Yesterday, we were telling many they needed to drink more water for their health, and some grimaced, knowing they get parasites from the water. When our nurses brought up ways to purify it, Pastor Abe Gonzalez said that they need to bathe in the river, so they just pick them up there. I thought of my family back home watering my lawn with potable water!

Then I was thinking that before bed I often take an ibuprophen to help with body aches, and if I have allergies, I have a pill for that, and if my skin itches, I have lotion. The aches and pains here are rampant with the stress they are under, the way they have to make tortillas and scrub laundry on a wash board, the hard work in the rocky soil to plant their crops, their walking and carrying, and the often unpleasant surfaces they sleep on. Some who came to our clinics made up pains so they could get some ibuprophen to save for pain they know will be coming, and many had real current pain, especially headaches. The kids have runny noses, and their skin often itches with this heat....and these conditions go on day after day without relief.

I was thinking about the path between the plastic houses... Have I ever been thankful for my floor?...I thought about hiding your family under cardboard to try to get protection from the pouring rain...Have I ever thanked God for my roof?

And at last, I was just thinking. Thinking how little I think about what I have.

Blessings to all, Cathy

Planting Seeds

Sunday, June 14, 2009

Hello Everyone,

We have planted seeds of projects here since 2000, and those seeds are bearing fruit and continue to grow. Seeds...last year, we were able to leave money to build the first building of the children's project and now they are using that building three times a week for Sunday school and for therapy groups run by a volunteer. Today we were able to worship in it, and well over 100 children were singing praises to God as we left. Seeds...The children's project, NNF, is in other communities as well. We helped them start it several years ago. When we went to one community we had visited many times in the past, I was dreading working with the wild and unruly kids that are usually there. I could not believe the change in them. They were angels!!! They now know about the love of God, how to help each other in a group, and have terrific behavior as they express the love God has for them. Seeds....The two families for whom we built houses last year have made good improvements to their homes! They have planted gardens with food growing in them and have constructed their bucket showers. Both mothers work hard in the children's project now, helping spread the word of God. Candida for whom we built a home several years ago is a legal member of the board of NNF and really helps the poor in her neighborhood now that she has adequate shelter. Seeds....We do a lot of health education in our clinics and tell them ways to avoid urinary tract infections, parasites, headaches, and the sore throats that come from cooking inside the home. Some ignore it, but for others, eyes light up and you know they are taking in what you are saying. Seeds.....Fourteen children were able to go to school this year due to the scholarship program Justin Dirkes started, and this year a few more will be able to be added. Who knows what benefit their education will bring, besides the dignity it gives them. Seeds.....We have built a number of roofs over shacks, and the people thank us over and over for the shelter it gives them from sun and rain. They are in better health and can care better for their families and themselves. Seeds.....Many here feel cared for and important as a result of our presence. They ask after those who are not with us this year. Marta said that the expression of love to them keeps some of them from gangs and gives them hope. Seeds....I am sure there are seeds I have left out....but they are here. Seeds....We do not know the fruit they have grown. I am sure some have died, but we keep planting, and crops keep growing. Thank you for giving us the means to plant these seeds....

In Christ,
Cathy

Small Things and Gratitude

Sunday night, June 14, 2009

We do a number of small ministries while we are here. We had a used wheel chair we had brought along. At the clinic yesterday there was a very elderly man having trouble walking, so we had him sit in it. We were at a small clinic in an area that had never been served by any mission group. The physical therapist saw the chair and explained that they have a lot of trouble getting many patients to the therapy room because they can hardly walk. The nurses in the area where babies are delivered want to use it as well to help mothers go to the appropriate area after they deliver babies. They have never had a wheel chair. It will be well used! What a contrast to our hospitals with a chair for whoever needs one.

Quilters gave us quilts that will go to impoverished families to keep them warm...yes, warm. In fact, I am chilly tonight after baking for a week. As their winter months come and they have to sleep on the hard dirt floor, they get cold.

Beanie babies are handed out to children at the hospital and at our clinics. For some, it is maybe the only thing that is soft in their lives. In the past, I have seen women rubbing them gently against their cheeks.

Computers have been delivered to help teachers in remote areas and to help children in the children's project begin computer classes. Only those who can afford private school get computer instruction here, and even in Nicaragua computer skills are very important to get good employment.

We donated money to a poor family where one member has a medical condition that necessitates surgery in Managua. They did not have the money for transportation to get there. Money has also been donated to a person who needs 70 dollar glasses that have very thick lenses. In the states they would cost hundreds of dollars, but even the 70 dollar price, he cannot afford them. Now he will be able to see.

Two intelligent young people want to go to college here, and that costs 30 dollars a month. Yes, you read this correctly, 30 a month. Imagine! Yet this is beyond their means. With our donations, they will be going.

There are other things we are doing, but because the internet cafe here is closing, I must also.

I wrote these two stories below earlier and will quickly share them...

Tonight Janeth had a medical consult with our wonderful doctor Jeanne Lewis. She has four children and gave birth two years ago to twins. For the last number of months, she

has been bleeding continually, but she needs a test that costs 23 dollars and some medicine to ease her pain. That is well beyond her means. The money was donated to her by our group and she wept with gratitude. Janeth is the first person I met when I first came. She lives in a simple concrete brick house and cooks outside on a fire. We would consider her very poor, but that first year I came, she took me around the neighborhood to show me the ones she called poor who were living with mud brick houses where the bricks had become wet and could collapse on them, who were living in plastic and stick houses that they had to rent from land owners, and others who were living much, much poorer than she. Tonight she accepted our help with tears of gratitude running down her face.

Tonight we had a band playing music at a restaurant owned by ex-mayor Marcio who is a key person in helping us get houses started and in doing our other projects. They played a song about how terrible the rains are as they come down on the houses made of cardboard. Candida, who was sitting beside me, started to weep for the families she knows without a home and who tonight got poured down upon by the torrential rain we had. Candida had to live where ever she could and at best lived under plastic before we built her a house four or so years ago. She knows what it is like.

Blessings, Cathy



A Wheel Chair is a small but wonderful gift.

Compassion, Respect and Care

Second Monday, June 15, 2009

Hello everyone,

This is our eighth day in the country and we are going to be conducting our last clinic today.

Compassion, respect, and a sense of dignity...These are things we bring not in our baggage, but we bring them in our hearts to distribute with abundance to the Nicaraguan people no matter what their status in life. And distribute them we do. Every single person in our group shows compassion and care to all they meet...the younger boys and young women when they play soccer across the street with local children...the five nurses here who do triage and run the pharmacy, the dentist and his dental assistant as they pull tooth after tooth, the doctor and the physician assistant who take the patients who need their expertise, the interpreters as they ask sometimes very personal questions, the construction crew as they interact with people in the neighborhood and the workers on the site, the physical therapist as she demonstrates exercises and stretches to alleviate pain, the Bible school teacher looks at each child and watches them light up as she says Jesus loves them very much....

Two days ago, a woman who was so thin I could have practically put both of my hands around her waist sat down where I was interpreting for a nurse. Her triage card said she had dental pain. I asked her first about it, and she frantically pointed to her mouth and shook her hand to say "NO, I do not want a dentist". She was clearly afraid. I told her all would be okay as I led her to the dentist in our group and returned to the nurse. A few minutes later I was called in to interpret for her. She was terrified in the dental chair. She bolted upright and grabbed my arms as I reassured her. Her grip was like a vise around my lower arm as the dentist very kindly checked her mouth. Up she came again, and we reassured her once more. She had only a few teeth left hanging down like a broken down fence. The others were broken down to the gum. It came time for injections. Terror overcame her again and she started to pant. Her head rolled back with the terror and she looked at me wide eyed and asked if I was her friend. I assured her I was....The first tooth came out, and she sat bolt upright exclaiming how extremely happy she was that she had felt no pain. And so it went through 6 extractions as she continued to cling, sometimes apologizing for her grip on my arms and hands, but being reassured it was not a problem, we were new friends. The dentist and assistant continued their kind, calm treatment. There were other teeth that needed to come out, but it would have been too much. At first, she was afraid of having pain afterwards. After a few minutes when she was with the nurse once again, she calmly exclaimed that she had none, and the dentist said she probably would not even later. Her body was calm, and her beautiful eyes were clear. We had a picture taken together as friends. She had been transformed at that moment.

Afterwards, the pharmacist from there said he knows her and dismissed her by saying she drank and was crazy. I asked if she had been abused, and he nonchalantly said yes. She was a nobody to him. Pastor Abe who leads us says this is the attitude of the many in the medical community here, that the poor are nobody to them. This time, she was treated with dignity and through out the day, the medical community had compassion demonstrated before them.

The horrible shacks people live in are called houses of humility. The houses we build are called houses of dignity.

Compassion, respect, and a sense of dignity and worth, together with the love of God...Perhaps these are the most valuable things we distribute.

Blessings, Cathy



Friends bonded by compassion, respect, and care.

I am Here and You are Here With Me – Thank You.

Second Tuesday, June 16, 2009

Hello everyone,

My apologies to those who have written to me. I was and still am extremely busy and have not had time to read mail. I will! This may be the last E mail, depending whether or not I can get access to a computer after today.

Many times people have told me things like, it is so good of you to do this, thank you for doing this. I do value their blessings. I do need to tell you, I am curious about these statements. I have a daughter going to graduate school in Hawaii and visited her once. No one came up to me and said it is so nice of you to visit her. Yet, it would have led me to the same type of wonder.....I love being here. I have to be honest, a few days before leaving sometimes I do not want to come. I am tired from the preparation and want to stay home. Once I set foot in Somoto, that feeling evaporates. I am the the most blessed one. I get to feel the hugs of the people, talk to the women who have become my friends through the years, see the smiles of the children and hear their glorious singing on Sunday. I am the one who sees the tears of gratitude and the one who gets to see the incredible beauty of this country with its vibrant green rain forests and clear blue sky. I am the one that gets to walk through the barrios and see the roofs and homes we have built and get to observe their incredible work in the children's project. I am the one that gets to feel the love of the people here and have the privilege of feeling the joy of making a difference, no matter how small that difference is in some one's life. I am very happy and have been very blessed to be here. I wish to thank you as well for the incredible support of all kinds, prayer...sending positive energy....collecting kitty litter buckets for supplies...money....words of encouragement...Thank YOU.

All of you are indeed here with me. Without you, we would have to say, "Oh, you cannot go to school. I'm sorry. God bless you" Without you, we would have to say, "Oh, you do not have a house, we are sorry. God bless you." "Oh, you cannot go to college or become a nurse in a remote village because you do not have funds, so sorry." "Oh, you have rotten teeth that hurt...So sorry, God bless you"...well, I could go on, but you get the idea. Thank you for being here with me.

The saying it is more blessed to give than receive is said so often, we do not really listen. It is so true. In giving we receive so much.

Blessings, Cathy

About the Local Government

Second Tuesday, June 16, 2009 - Email Number Two

Hello everyone,

These E mails are written quickly with very little to no editing and a Spanish key board...so punctuation does not exist or is wrong!

Many ask if the government of Nicaragua does anything to help its people. This largely depends on who is in power. The previous government did not, and posters of the president were defaced. The current one tries, and each poster is perfectly clean. As it was explained to me by Rosario, this is a great sign of respect for the current administration! The new government has, for example, renewed a literacy program in which people go to remote villages to teach it. The statistics vary, but the literacy rate went from about 90 some percent down to 70 some percent with the past one.

In our own project, the local government has done a lot to help us and the projects. They donated the land for the building of the children's project and for the 5 houses we have built these last two years. This is no small donation! Land ownership in Nicaragua is very complicated, so this is a vital gift. Before we got here, Marta and Marcio donated many hours of their time to buy materials for building the three homes and had the homes well underway when we arrived, just the way we like them! Marta worked with the head of Children Services in the state government to get the latrines for the houses donated and each costs \$800. This was from money that Plan Nicaragua made available to the Somoto area...They included last years homes, so this was a \$4000 donation...No small donation in Nicaragua!!! A few years ago when I was here, there were few to no clinics. Now there are many more. Dr. Jeanne Lewis who has been with us 4 times has seen the improvement.

There are individual examples as well. Daniel who spoke to us at Bethlehem is a political appointee, as the medical people seem to be!!! He is the one who, along with 11 other doctors, put in place the program to train nurses in remote villages. They gave up their lunches and worked to find any way they could to transport them, print training materials, sleep them on the floor of a hospital room, get them uniforms, etc. There are other things people in the government are doing as well, but this gives you some examples.

With the government that came into power a year ago, the improvement in medical care is very evident. Someone wrote and asked me if there is de-worming. The last two years, there has been a lot of de-worming done in the many local clinics that have sprung up. De-worming medication is cheap now. One of the bigger issues now is educating the people to use it. Some communities we are in are much better educated in health issues than others. The first clinic we were in that had 400 patients had extremely poor health education. They were much further away from Somoto and, due to hurricane Mitch a number of years ago, very, very poor. Essentially every single one of them, along with

their families, needed de-worming. In fact, we ran out of the week's worth of medication and had to buy from the local pharmacy! Each time we gave it, most of us explained how very important it was to de-worm everyone in the household when the worms were present. Then there is the other issue....The clinics do not dispense the medication unless a stool turns out positive. There are many false negative tests, depending on the sample.

BUT....This is my favorite example of all. Marcio Rivas is the ex mayor of Somoto. He was in power at least four years and was replaced this year. What he did for the town of Somoto is incredible, and when I can consult with Pastor Abe, I will fill in details. He built many, many homes for the homeless and helped us immensely building ours with the purchase of materials at discounted prices and with the choosing of appropriate families. He not only provided a home, but kept watch over them, seeing that they cared for it appropriately! He built a market that can be kept clean, a library, a nursing home to care for the homeless elderly, and many other things. This is what is amazing to me. When he came into office, he announced to the people that he would not in any way take even one penny for a salary because he was donating all of it to help the poor! This is not because he is rich. He is not! I saw his house, and it is simple and one we would consider poor. He then spent at least four years in office doing just that, helping the poor and donating money. Can you imagine the mayor of Boulder, Greeley, Longmont, Everygreen, or any other place in the US doing that!!!! Can you do anything more than this as a government official to help your own people?

Blessings, Cathy



Marcio Rivas (on the left), ex-mayor of Somoto, gave his salary to the poor.

Quilts

Second Tuesday, June 16, 2009 - Email Number Three - Sent June 18, 2009

Hi Everyone,

I do not know why in Nicaragua my mailing list was the first I made up and not this one. If you have not received the other E-mails I sent and would like them, please let me know!

Quilts....

Quilts in Nicaragua? "You have to be kidding" someone in our group exclaimed as he had sweat pouring down his forehead. But...yes indeed...quilts ARE needed by some. Three years ago Candida took me to a shack, one of the worst I had seen up to that time. The "walls" of scraps of torn wood had numerous holes and gaps, due to the extremely uneven borders of the planks. Attempts had been made to cover some of the holes with scraps of plastic, but most of the plastic had been torn by the torrential rains and was hanging down. The dirt floor was hard as concrete and covered in uneven lumps and bumps, caused by the numerous rocks in the soil. If you removed them, there are only more underneath.... The woman who had the home explained that four families lived there. I did not understand how they could live in such a small space. "Oh", she explained, "each has their own area". She showed me the 5 foot by 6 foot square of earthen floor where one of the families lived. Candida explained that their winter would be coming and the floor would be very cold and the air crisp. (Yes, I even got chilly after the rains a couple times on this baking weather trip!) They needed quilts. We bring some every year. Quilts for warmth and comfort in their bodies and in their soul.

In Christ,
Cathy



Quilts help with the cold and damp in homes like this.

What Makes You Happy?

Second Tuesday, June 16, 2009 - Email Number Four - Sent June 18, 2009

Happiness...What is it?

I looked all around me as I toured a barrio. Houses encircled me...plastic bag and stick houses, collapsing scraps of wood houses, small concrete brick houses, mud and straw brick houses....They stood as monuments to the poverty that surrounded me. I said something about it to Candida. "Yes, they are poor", she replied, "but they are happy." Happy? I had heard people say the poor were happy, and I had always considered it a way to ease their conscience. "Why?" I wanted to know. "They are happy because they are alive and their life was given by God," she replied.

What makes you happy?

Blessings, Cathy



Candida

Paying It Forward

Wednesday, June 17, 2009 - Email sent June 18, 2009

Hi Everyone,

I am sorry to send out so many E-mails at once. I had to write by hand the last several days since I did not have time to access the internet.

Paying it forward....

This is a concept of asking that when something good is done for you, you repay the person by doing something good for someone else. We have a chance to see this in action here. I have already talked about Candida, the one who received a house from us and has been busy helping the people even poorer than herself ever since. There are many examples here, but let me tell you another. Last year we built a house for Flora, an elderly grandmother caring for her daughter with Downs Syndrome and her two grandchildren who have it as well. After she received her home, she paid it forward as well. She lives at the base of the site where the first building for the children's project, NNF, was built. When they were building last year with money we donated, the construction materials had to lie outside. In Nicaragua, this is an invitation for thieves. Each night, night after night, she stayed up to guard the materials. In doing so, she was putting her own safety in danger. People in NNF tried to dissuade her, but she could not be moved. She had received a house, and now she was determined to give back. She paid it forward not only at night, but during the day as well as she hauled water to the construction crew both to drink and to mix the concrete....bucket after bucket, up the hill she went until four in the afternoon. The building is now well constructed and used several times a week for well over a hundred children. She continues to work in NNF and in the worship service we had, put flowers she had grown in her garden on the altar. A beautiful gesture from a beautiful woman.

Blessings, Cathy

The Beauty of Somoto

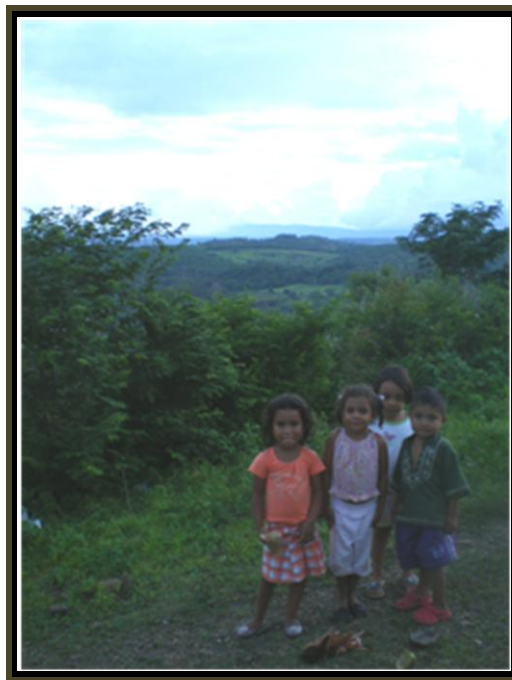
Wednesday, June 17, 2009 - Email Number 2 Sent June 19, 2009

We Lift Our Eyes and Look unto the Hills.

I have written a lot about the hardships and suffering here, yet there is significant beauty here as well. Walking with Candida through her impoverished barrio the other day, we stopped on top of a hill overlooking the city. Two children were playing in the dirt, and I took time to look away from them and over their heads. The view took my breath away. The green of the plants from the rain forest is deep and rich and it contrasts sharply with the crystal blue of the sky. Amidst the shacks there was beauty all around for 360 degrees. As we drove to clinics, at times we passed through parts of the rain forest. Many would pay for an expensive vacation to see this. On Sunday we went to a park above a river in a village outside Somoto. We saw cashews growing, stunning wild flowers, and amazing tropical plants, a natural botanic garden. The day before we left, we visited a rich blue lake that sits in the caldera of an old volcano. In my youth, I spent some years working at Crater Lake, a similar lake, and this is different but just as beautiful. The first time I came here in 2003, I remember when towards the end of the trip someone commented on the beauty around Somoto. What? Beauty? Where, I wondered. I looked up. There it was. I was so wrapped up in the tasks at hand; I had failed to see it. I hope not to make that mistake again....where ever I am.

Blessings, Cathy

Beauty All Around



God's Transforming Love

Thursday, June 18, 2009 - Second email sent June 19, 2009

Hi Everyone, I am sorry once again to send so many at once.....

Yes, Jesus Loves Me

We were at La Playa, a place we had been before. The clinic was over, but the dentist still had work to do, so I had some free time. I picked up coloring pages with the picture of Jesus on them and some crayons from the VBS supplies and stepped outside the gate. "Do you want to color?" I asked two kids. "Yes", they bubbled and started to follow me, and in seconds I had 25 or so squealing along behind me as we walked down the road to a grassy area. They had suddenly appeared! We talked briefly about how Jesus loves each and everyone of us, and they started to color, lined up neatly in a row. A little later, a woman who had come by fainted and I quickly got the medical team here to care for her as she came to and wept on the ground. I backed away, giving them space. A girl brought her finished picture up to me. What beautiful colors and good work, I exclaimed. Then I looked in her eyes, touched her shoulder, and told her that Jesus loved her very, very much. She beamed. Then the next came, and then the next. The process went on and the response to the blessing was always the same, a grin that went from ear to ear hearing about God's love. God's love, it transforms.

Blessings, Cathy



The children coloring are those who started to come up for a blessing and beamed afterwards.

Christie Ritter's Story

June 20, 2009 - Fwd: My Story

Cathy,

I hope that you are doing well back home! It was great to see John and Rachel at the airport the other day. Thank you so much for a great trip this year! Below is my story, and if you would like, you can email it out to those on your email list or do whatever you want with it.

God's love and peace,
Christie Ritter

Personal Narrative

Someone once told me that you are never prepared for the moment that changes your life. This simple thought has always stuck with me and after a chance encounter in of all places, Somoto, Nicaragua, I can say that this statement is true.

As a child, I had always imagined God to be some huge man with sparkling white robes, an elegant, long beard, and a gentle face. I thought that he lived somewhere in the clouds with beautiful angels with harps and wings, and looked down at us from above. These were my thoughts for as long as I could remember. It took sixteen years and a few simple moments to turn my whole perception around.

Allow me to start at the beginning. My mother spent a week working as the nurse at a camp in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. At dinner one night, one of the pastors asked her if she was interested in a trip to Nicaragua. His name was Abe and he was leading a mission trip there, and was in need of one more nurse. My mother, thinking that she was politely declining, asked Abe if she could bring her whole family along; a husband and three kids. To her astonishment, Abe declared that he would love it if she brought the whole lot of us.

Before we really knew what we were getting into, we were signed up to participate in this mission trip. Family members and friends laughed when we told them about our summer plans. They wondered why we were going to spend our vacation in one of the world's poorer countries, dedicating our time to people with whom we didn't even share the same language. But when it became evident that we were seriously going to fly to Nicaragua for ten days, they began to question our sanity. None of the family had an exact reason for the desire to travel to Nicaragua, but there was an unstated understanding that we needed to go.

June 10th, the day of our departure, came sooner than I could have ever even anticipated. The family woke up at "o' dark thirty" as my father always says, to catch a flight from Denver to Miami. From Miami, the missions group, clad in matching blue T-shirts, boarded the plane to the airport in Managua, Nicaragua.

Everything was so incredibly green in Nicaragua. Manuel, our driver, drove the whole group North on the Pan American highway for four hours in a school bus with

chrome wheels. The hours passed rapidly. There was so much to see and process. It was all different, but the first thing I noticed was the houses. Each house was rectangular, and made of cinder blocks. The largest house was no more than thirty feet long and no more than twenty feet wide. Large families of sometimes even nine or ten all fit into these houses, and were so thankful to have a roof over their heads. Many families had no house at all.

Manuel drove us up to a town called Somoto, where we spent our time building two houses, and hosting medical clinics for those who could not afford to visit any medical personnel. Most people in Nicaragua fit this category.

It was one of these medical clinics where I met her.

I never learned her name, but she sticks out in my memory as sharp as the moment she first caught my eye. She wore a small red jumper, with a velcro pocket on the front and three white stars on the pocket. The white stars contrasted with her deep, brown skin. Under the jumper was a red and white shirt with a dainty red bow on the neckline. Her hair, tied back in a loose ponytail, was jet black, and it shone in the sunlight that peeked through the shade of an avocado tree. The most unforgettable part of her was her eyes. These eyes caught the rays of the sun and that same radiance emulated from them. They were a very dark brown, and very intense. It was as if she could see straight into my heart, and I wouldn't be surprised if she truly did.

When I met her, she flashed the most sincere smile I had ever seen. She was just like the other kids at that medical clinic, with dirty, shoeless feet and a bright attitude, but she was also different than those other kids. She was distant from the others, and never once did I hear a peep from her delicate mouth. She was deaf.

Her parents were among the others there in line to be seen by the doctors, and we were making Popsicle stick crosses with yarn to keep the children busy while their parents were being seen. I helped this girl make a cross, and when we were done, she did not leave me to go play in the dirt with the other boys and girls. She held on to my hand tightly and spent the entire afternoon by my side. I often would look up from the latest project to see her eyes, and a shy smile from her face. I had no way of communicating with this girl, yet I sensed something between us. It was something more powerful than a simple friendship, and I knew that both she and I understood that.

When it was finally time for the Doctors and Nurses to pack up for the evening, she looked me in the eye, and wrapped her small arms around me. I couldn't help but hug her back, knowing that I would most likely never see her again.

It was later that evening, back in the hotel room, that I realized the significance of these moments to my life. I realized that I had no way of truly connecting with her, that something bigger than me needed to be in this situation, allowing us to share a few precious instances.

As I lie on the small hotel bed, with the cool air from the fan slowly passing over me, I felt a wave of understanding wash over me.

I began to grasp the idea that this life is incredibly short.

Medical Care – Comparison of U.S. and Nicaragua

Second Thursday, June 18, 2009 – Second Email Sent June 20, 2009

Hello,

Medical Care. It can be such a pain. Sometimes I dash around to get to the appointment on time only to be told the doctor has had an emergency and I have to wait...an hour or so. Someone I know had an ovarian cyst and was doubled over in pain. Neither her doctor nor the doctor's clinic could not take her and told her to go to urgent care. She spent eight hours there doubled over before she had been thoroughly checked.

Someone recently had a \$3000 medical procedure before he was on Medicare. The insurance company, thinking erroneously he was already on Medicare, told the cardiology clinic that pre-authorization was not necessary. Months later, the insurance company, who made this mistake, still has the case in appeal. The cardiology clinic has great documentation as to who told them what and when and of the many times they tried to collect. He has spent hours trying to get it straightened out. In the meantime, the \$3000 bills keep being sent.

But what if we were all living in Nicaragua? Janeth, a member of the NNF board, looked green and the saddest I have ever seen her in the 6 years I have known her. She told me she had been bleeding for a long time and needed a medical test she could not afford. Her husband is a police officer but makes very little. Could we help her? she pleaded. I had to check with Abe. Yes, we could. I handed her the money and she wept. The next day she had the ultrasound and our doctor Jeanne told her she has tumors near her ovaries that have to be removed surgically. They may be cancerous. She may be able to get the care she needs in a hospital for the families of police officers in Managua. If we had not been there, she would have continued to bleed, to feel weak, and to not know the cause. A woman in our group who donated the money for her tests and initial medication would like to set up a fund for women like her. This type of problem is common.

The next time I am tempted to complain about the care I am receiving, I will try to think about Janeth.

Blessings,
Cathy

Real Hunger

June 27, 2009 - Nicaragua Story #9

Hello,

Hunger. We have all seen the face of it on TV. Living skeletons squat on the ground as flies buzz around them. In my trips here, except for a few exceptions, hunger is more subtly present, but very present non-the-less. Last year, as a therapist, I was helping a woman learn a technique to decrease her trauma from physical abuse. I explained that the technique would work with many different feelings. She brightened up...."Will it help with feelings of hunger too?"

My gut reacts every time we perform what has become a group ritual the last few years. After eating lunch, we gather up the leftovers off our plates and combine them, used forks, scraps, and all. The first time we did this a few years ago, we even saved the chicken bones with a few tatters of meat on them. I will never forget the tears streaming from a group member's face after returning from the hospital. They had distributed those "leftovers" at the hospital where people received them with relief and great expressions of gratitude, bones and all. It was the same this year, "Thank you so much. I was wondering if I would have anything to eat today". Patients only eat if friends or relatives can bring them something.

Kids arrived at our clinics with beautiful red streaks in their glistening dark hair...Beautiful, except for the fact that the red hair is the result of significant malnutrition.

Then there was the woman at the clinic, the type I love to photograph with dark brown leather skin folding in waves over her cheeks. She was standing nearby during our lunch break. I asked her how we could help her, and she unconvincingly muttered something about the clinic we were running. A few minutes later, I heard Dona Carla tell her that no, we had no food. Wait, I blurted. The two large pieces of meat in our lunch boxes had not yielded to my thin plastic fork, and I had left them. Here they are. Glancing at the meat, she seized the box from Dona Carla's hands and almost simultaneously tried to shove it into her tattered back pack. Folding the styrofoam box with a flurry of movement, she shoved it in the next time, glancing furtively from side to side to see if anyone was attempting to snatch her prize. May I take your picture, I asked. In a second, she blurted, dashing to the road and whipping her head from side to side, looking for someone. She dashed by me again. She had won the food lottery and was not about to pause for a picture and chance losing her grand prize.

Hunger....One of the world's worst epidemics.

Blessings, Cathy

Last Email

July, 2009

Hello again,

Well, we have been back for several weeks. We felt God's presence every day. Thank you so much for your prayers! Loaves and fishes continue to multiply as the addition of women's co-ops through Niños y Niñas del Futuro was made due to two special donations given to help two families. Through those donations, six families will be helped!

So many of you gave of your financial resources and goods for our trip. Without these donations, we would not have been able to fund the following.

- \$17,600 - To build four houses for four extremely impoverished families living in horrendous conditions. The fourth house is for a family living in a mud brick house that has become wet in areas and is on the verge of collapsing on them!
- \$500.00 - Given to provide at least five roofs to protect people living in shacks from blazing sun and torrential rains.
- \$1350.00 - To develop a sewing co-op with three women and a baking co-op for three women so that all six can not only support their families but also stay near their children to protect and care for them while they work.
- \$4891.00 - For two college scholarships and scholarships for a minimum of 16 other children so that they can attend school and have breakfast each morning before going.
- \$70.00 - For a woman to get a medical exam that identified tumors and for her to receive medication to ease the symptoms.
- \$30.00 - To transport someone to Managua for medical care.
- \$70.00 - For glasses for someone needing a special prescription for extremely poor eye sight.
- \$425.00 - For support of the children's project Niños y Niñas del Futuro
- \$420.00 - For 300 pair of eye glasses fit and distributed to people.
- \$434.70 - To give blood pressure cuffs and stethoscopes to 30 nursing students who serve remote villages that do not have access to medical care.
- \$500.00 - To support the training of nursing students to serve remote villages.
- \$100.00 - To pay to transport 4 extra bags of supplies to Nicaragua on the airplane
- \$469.69 - For medication purchased in the US and Nicaragua for the clinics. (Note: Hundreds of dollars of medication was donated by Danielle Mendiola from a donation they had received from an organization, saving us hundreds of dollars. Someone in the US also donated the ibuprophen.)
- \$000.00 - (All of the dental supplies and medication were donated by the dentist and his assistant and dentists in the Greeley area, saving hundreds of dollars.)

- \$179.00 - For VBS supplies and books from designated donation. They will be used in 2010.
- \$200.00 - To purchase wooden items to use to raise funds for 2010. (Purchased with a donation given for this purpose.)

Total Mission Funds spent to date for 2009 projects: \$27,239.39

We are home, but we are not idle. Our mission work continues through out the year. Already, computers, wheel chairs, and walkers are being gathered. Communication with Niños y Niñas and the children who have scholarships is going on. A few people are donating some funds regularly or giving special one time donations. Presentations about our work are being made. Names of people interested in going this coming year are being gathered, and the board will meet soon to review the trip and make plans.

We are relieved that we have nearly \$7000 still in our fund that can be sent to start the house construction before our big fund drive next year or partly used for any pressing need that occurs within our projects. This year, we had to send \$2300 in the winter for building bathrooms and providing potable water for Niños y Niñas del Futuro and send \$10,000 in very early spring to start buying materials and building the three homes so they would be ready for us to work on when we were there.

Please continue to pray for us and bless each one of you. Because of your support of all kinds, this work continues.

In Christ,
Cathy



Your contributions at work



A Sewing Machine = Husband

Several months ago a member of my congregation brought several sewing machines to take to Nicaragua. As we were packing we discovered one of the machines did not work. In Nicaragua I took the machine to my sister's house where I and another person cleaned the machine. We discovered the problem was a simple one. The machine needed to be cleaned up and oiled. After we were done the machine worked like new.

That same day a lady who worked at the hotel where we were staying asked me for the machine. This lady shared her story with me. She has two or three children, works at the hotel cleaning the rooms and takes care of the hotel for twelve hours every day. She makes about \$1.50 a day. The money she makes can hardly cover her monthly expenses. Worst of all her husband was killed early last year. This means that now she does not get the support that her husband used to provide. The day before I left I gave the sewing machine to this young woman. I could see her eyes getting watery and with a broken voice she said: "Don Abe, this machine will be my husband." I left as fast as I could because when she mentioned these words I remembered my mother who supported her family with a sewing machine. In fact, I have used the same expression when talking about my mother and her sewing machine. I hope that this sewing machine will change the lives of this lady and her children.

As I look back at our trip I think of how many lives were changed by the simple gift that we gave to people. I think of this simple sewing machine which we were able to take by the generosity of one person. The potential it has to change the lives of a whole family. I hope that each one of us can take some time and be able to discover the potential there is in each one of us to change the lives of those who are around us.

Pastor Abe Gonzalez

What can you do?

- ✝ Pray for the Nicaragua Mission and the people of Somoto.

- ✝ Volunteer to be a member of the Nicaragua Task Force at Bethlehem Lutheran Church. This is a new group put in place to assist with the year-long support and administrative needs of such a large mission effort.

- ✝ Volunteer to be a part of next year's mission trip.

- ✝ Help recruit other volunteers for the trip, especially medical and dental professionals.

- ✝ Share this booklet with friends and family so that a wider audience knows about the work being done in Nicaragua.

- ✝ Donate tooth brushes, diabetic and orthopedic supplies, wheel chairs and walkers, layettes, stomach and rash medication, pain reliever, throat lozenges, crayons and pens and pencils, beanie babies, new thin quilts, and lap top computers.

- ✝ Donate to the ongoing Nicaragua project. Please send any checks c/o Bethlehem Lutheran Church located at 1000 West 15th Avenue, Longmont, Co 80501. Please clearly mark each check as being for the Nicaragua project. This will ensure that the donations are credited to the correct account.