



Fundación Manos Juntas

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Medical Mission Trips Visit to Our Students, Fall 2004

By Dr. Boyd Shook

This time was a solo effort. There are many things going on in Nicaragua that caused me to visit. My primary goal was to establish better communication with the staff at FUNDECI and with the students receiving scholarship support. In addition there were a few patients who requested medical attention. I really need very little reason to visit, since I always benefit from my experiences in Nicaragua. La Posadita de Bolognia is beginning to feel like home. The staff are very nice and work hard to assure my comfort.

An unexpected event gave this particular visit an extra level of enjoyment. This is Patria Semana, the week to celebrate love of Nicaragua. Celebration is somewhat analogous to Independence Day in the USA. However, I did not see any fireworks nor hear anything suggesting that. There was, however, music and holidays from work. All government agencies, most businesses, many restaurants, and all banks were closed for two days. Fortunately, I had enough cordobas from last brigade to buy everything I needed. Besides, plastic is still the most efficient method of money transfers.

My first task on Monday was to deliver medications that had been special ordered. We drove to Nandaime to locate the mother of Karelya, one of my special friends from La Esperanza, the women's prison. We were able to locate her in spite of my incorrect directions. I enjoyed meeting two sisters and the mother of Karelya, but



I was surprised and pleased to see her daughter. She is 7 years old and is absolutely beautiful. She was born in prison and has lived since birth with her grandmother and aunts. The two sisters are also very attractive but not as beautiful as Karelya. The house has many pictures of Karelya as she grew up. One of Karelya's sisters has epilepsy and needed special medications that I had brought for her. The rest of the family is healthy but worry a lot about Karelya. Both sisters are enrolled in school at the university in Managua. The drama of Karelya unfolds bit by bit. It seems clear that she was involved in the death of a man.

It is also clear that it was a crime of passion. The case was very famous in Nicaragua but seven years has dulled the precision of memory. My poor understanding of Spanish creates even greater obstacles to obtaining a clear story. I do not know if she had adequate legal representation, but my sketchy knowledge suggests that this was a crime of passion and perhaps even justifiable homicide. Her relationship to the victim is still uncertain. Abuse of young women is still too frequent in our society. This may just be such a case. More research is required for comprehension.

The second day was busy with student visits. We drove to their homes and were able to visit with them in their own place. I was torn with the desire to take pictures of the squalor of their environment and the idea that they are not defined by this environment. If I closed my eyes as we drove to their homes and then opened them after being inside, the picture is totally different. The rooms are clean even if there is no floor. There are flowers growing around the living areas. At each place I was served refreshment.

The children are clean and full of life. Most of these dwellings have 3-5 families. The average family unit in Nicaragua is 5, although the number of children per family is decreasing. Grandmothers frequently do all of child care so that parents can work a little to generate enough funds for food. Everyone seems to contribute in some fashion. The dirt floor is moistened and swept several times each day by children no older than 5. Clothing items are washed by hand and hung to dry. They are then ironed later as time develops. In most areas one of the families will have a television set where children of the neighborhood gather. Radios and CD players are common for entertainment and news. Since it was a holiday, none of the students were away, so I was able to see each one on my list.

Tuesday night was a night of dreams. After a long nap Octavio, Jose Antonio, and I started looking for dinner. We went to several of our usual choic-

es, but they had closed for the holiday. Eventually, we came upon a place called Maria Bonita. It was mostly empty, but they greeted us warmly and offered a table in front of the music stand. The tortilla chips and salsa were in abundance while we studied the menu. The tortilla chips are not as thin and crisp as Mexican restaurants in Oklahoma, but the taste is nice. The salsa is not too hot, but the pickled onions and jalapenos make up for it. The shrimp were really good and were abundant in quantity.

The feature of the evening was a guitar player and singer who were marvelous. He played music from each of the Americas and from many decades. His rendition of La Paloma was enough to bring tears to my eyes. His management of Malaguena was incredible. For once I was in no hurry to leave as I drifted away in dreams and danced under a tropical moon. I always dance better when I sit at a table and close my eyes so that the music carries me away from my concerns. It was an evening of majestic reverie.

It rained every day of this visit. At night the rains pounded on the sheet metal to create noise that was fierce. During the day the rains were soft. It did not seem necessary to seek shelter, but once in a while they were heavy. Street flooding was common as storm sewers were filled to capacity.

Sometimes, though, it was nice to allow the rain to fall. There is a cleansing quality to softly falling rain. Clothing dries out quickly, so damage from staying in the rain is minimal. At night there was thunder but the soft rains of the day were silent. Since the days are so hot, the cooling rains are welcome. We did have umbrellas in our vehicle in case we needed to stay dry. The street merchants carry a plastic sheet to cover their merchandise. The occurrence is frequent enough that no one seems to be disturbed, and business proceeds as usual.

After a hard shower the streets are littered with blossoms from the beautiful trees of Nicaragua. A collection of wild colors becomes pos-

sible quickly during a walk along the sidewalks. One of the prettiest blossoms this week was a deep orange. The colors are similar to the malinche, but this blossom had petals. I was not able to obtain a name from several people, so I quite asking. More research is in order.

There are blossoms of white, yellow, red, and orange on the trees around Managua. There are crepe myrtles of several colors. My favorite is light purple or dark lilac.

The official tree of Nicaragua is malinche. The official flower is the sacuanjoche. The official bird is the guardabarranco. I like to search out these symbols to gain better understanding of the culture. The official food is gallo pinto. This rice and beans combination is usually served at every meal.