

## What is in a Name?

The Centurion: A Centurion was a leader in the Roman army who headed 100 men. These men were well respected within the ranks, usually having been promoted from the common soldier ranks, and were the backbone of the Romans discipline. In Biblical terms, the Centurion of Matthew 8 was a man credited for his faith, a faith that led to a miracle. It is my hope that my faith will be like his and that this may be a record of how this may come to be. Furthermore, I am in the Lord's army, as the song goes. This is my battlefield. Wherever you are is yours. Arm yourself well and always be prepared to give and answer for the hope that you have. If you do not know that hope, take the time, now, to find out about it. It is time to meet Jesus – not the fellow they talked about a church when you were a kid, but the real living and breathing Jesus. Start in *John*, the fourth book of the Bible; get to know Him a bit. Listen to His words as though He were in the chair next to you. This is not just some story, but the most important decision you will every make. Will you believe what Jesus says and do it or not? In one phrase, *Rush* says it well, "If you choose not to decide you still have made a choice". Everyday I am finding more and more that God is not obvious, but He is not elusive. He has already done the work and He is waiting that more may come to Him.

## Cast of Characters:

Marcus and Ann Pearson (Will and Amelia): The missionary family that have been serving here for many years. Marcus is the one directing most of the projects that I am encountering.

Nadia Vasquez: Former Director of the School of Little Benjamin whom I met during my last visit. I am staying with her while I am here. She loves movies and finds many things enormously funny. She also speaks English. She is part of the Bible Institute initiative.

Alexandra Mendoza: Current Director of the school. She is a gentle and gracious woman that I like very much. She loves the Lord and children and has taken to bringing me to church with her.

Yesthenia: Assistant Director at the school and closest to my age. She and I are becoming friends.

Carla: Secretary at the school. She is one of the women I have spent the most time with at the school. She, too, is part of the friendly group with which I am most at ease.

Patricia: Custodian of the school. Quite the caretaker of people, too. She has as servant's heart and is also one of that group.

Leia, Rocky, Queenie, and Princessa: The four dogs that I adore and who have taken to me quite well (even Leia who likes no one!). \*We now have six more to add to that collection. They are unnamed as of now.

## Happy Trails

A tourist Visa in Nicaragua is valid for 90 days. After this, you are fined for each day beyond 90 and not permitted to leave the country until the fine is paid. So that I would stay "legal", I needed to leave the country in September. The Pearsons were taking a family vacation to the Ruins of Copan in Honduras and invited me to come along (two birds with one stone, as it were). I really enjoyed the trip, especially as we were able to get much closer to the ruins (walk on them and touch them) than we could have in any such place in the States. Alas, despite good intentions, leaving the country via Honduras was not enough. It seems that Nicaragua and Honduras, along with most other Latin American

countries are part of an alliance. My VISA was for admittance to Latin America, not just to Nicaragua. I needed to go to Costa Rica or Mexico in order to “leave and return”. So, the day after we returned from Honduras, I left on the bus for Costa Rica. I have the uncanny luck of meeting exceptionally helpful people (God is good). On the way to Costa Rica, I was “adopted” by a gentlemen who made this very journey every ten days or so for business. He took me under his wing, led me through the frontera, helped with the passport transaction, provided a body shield between me and the impatient woman behind us, and walked me safely across the border into another country. There we parted company and I was left to read my book and eat lunch. Four hours later, I am on my way back to Nicaragua. On this leg of the journey, I run into a gentleman from Great Britain. He is making his way through Latin America. His Spanish is very poor, so it becomes my opportunity to help him. It turns out that David, this gentleman, is not British at all, but rather comes from the small island of Mauritius. By God’s good humor, I have been to Mauritius, which cemented our strange alliance. He was up for traveling as a real Nicaraguan so we found ourselves on a bus to Rivas. It was a pleasant journey. He asked questions and I answered those I could. We parted company in Rivas. I wish him good luck, wherever he is. I really do meet the nicest people. Whether I am on a bus to Costa Rica or lost in Managua (not a good idea, by the way), there seems to be someone there to point the way. God has mercy on a poor sense of direction.

“We need to find a hill.”

So were the first words I heard on a sunny Sunday morning in September. We were all set to go to Alambikambang again, much to my delight, but, alas, the best laid plans of mice and men can be done in by truck trouble. Taking this particular truck was a last minute alternative. The original plan was to join another party headed that way to save on gas expenses. By the end of Saturday, it was clear there would be no room in that vehicle for our gear, let alone us! So, we were back to square one and the truck that has been on the fritz for quite awhile. That we needed to find a hill was amusing, but not surprising. For those who don’t drive a clutch, a hill is a perfect means of jumpstarting a vehicle that doesn’t want to ignite. Sometimes we just need a little running start. Alas, even a running start didn’t help this time. As Marcus said, “This is how you come limping back, not how you set out”. Getting stuck in Tipitapa is far preferable to being stranded in the middle of no man’s land where few vehicles roam. The bus towed us to a corner. The fellows pushed, while I steered, the truck into a station. The truck is starting now (it had a bad alternator), but it is a wary relationship we have with it.

Like celebrity deaths, vehicle trouble comes in threes. The next fun was easily fixed by replacing a battery terminal. The third trouble was a bit of a doosey, mostly because it involved a much larger crowd. . .

## Oh, When the Saints Come Marching In!

The first week of October brought a very welcome sight. Nine members of Harvester Christian Church, my home base, gathered here in Nicaragua for a

mission trip. They were here to put on a VBS program (Vacation Bible School) for children in El Serrano and Yolaina, small rural communities in northern Nicaragua. They also proved to be a great encouragement to me, whether that was their intent or not, and to several of the people they met. But, as we know, Satan does not like the work of God. It is not surprise then that this adventure began with a bump and a bang – car trouble. Instead of using that truck on the fritz, a vehicle had been rented from the place where the group would be spending their first and last few nights here, Provedenic. This was a large truck with a long bed in which we road covered-wagon style, with the wind as our temperature control. With a 70km to go to the nearest town with housing, Nueva Guinea, the clutch refused to work. After rolling the truck down a hill against traffic (there really wasn't any) and getting it just barely started and barely moving, it was decided that we would take the bus, the public transportation system. Alas, we had missed the first bus, and there was no certainty as to when the second would pass. We limped along, but God does not forget his people, and that bus came rumbling by. We flagged it down and transferred all the baggage nine people traveling for a week and putting on a VBS program need, plus a couple of extra bags for Marcus, Will, and myself, water containers and all 12 travelers. The bus was full, so there was standing room only, but everyone took it in stride without complaining. In fact, there was quite a bit of laughter going on. That truck limped into town a few hours after we arrived. We used to get to the towns, but only for these short trips in which being stuck in 2<sup>nd</sup> gear was just fine. We took the night bus back to Managua after out two days of VBS, arriving at 3 am and all but falling into bed.

But the story of this group is not in its vehiclar adventures, though they continued through out their time here. The real story is in bringing to these children a day of fun and Christ-centered learning. It is hard work to put together a VBS program, and more so when your audience speaks a different language. This group worked hard and put together an excellent day that touched not only the lives of those kids, who will remember it for the rest of their lives, but also those members of the community standing on the edge, watching and listening, and those people we did not see who know that these strangers came to their town to spend time with their children. As one mother said, you feel differently when someone does something nice for your child.

After our first VBS program, we had a time of sharing. Someone shared a thought, a sentiment that I had shared and worried over for some time. This is so little that we are doing. How can it really make an impact – a few hours against so many other hours and so many other struggles and influence? We know that God can do infinitely more than we ask or imagine, but sometimes in this human perspective we are left feeling the little we can do is insignificant. Where Sunday school in the States builds on one story after another to illustrate God's love and his plan over the course of a year, here, we were throwing the whole of it at one time.

After about two and a half months here, and after having read yet again that Great Commission, I found myself struck by a very powerful and comforting revelation. I was in someone else's Jerusalem. This, Nicaragua, was my "end of the Earth", but it was someone else's home, someone else's Samaria. This was not me alone serving God's plan; this was me being a part of it and knowing that

there would be others, and were others right now, who were bringing the same message to Jerusalem. In bringing these VBS programs and teaching seminars, we share the Word and manifest God's love, as commanded, and bring encouragement to the believers in this Jerusalem. Christ knew when he said it that there would be times when we felt overwhelmed and impotent by the sheer magnitude of the command, but that is when we can remember God is mindful of us and new what would be from the very beginning. Though far from home, we are in someone else's Jerusalem.

The group continued to persevere and I was blessed to be able to join with them. Valeria, who acted as translator for the project was amazing. (Keep here in your prayers as she works very hard and is always in need of refreshing.) Later in the week, we had the chance to play tourist. I was grateful to be allowed to tag along (I had not yet played tourist here). We spent some time in the markets and then went on to see the Volcano in Masaya (aside\* It was incredible. Because of the high humidity right now, the fumes from the volcano appeared to be billowing and turning like a mushroom cloud. Caught in the wind, the white vapors swirled and danced above our heads sending whiffs of sulfur. We went on a night tour that took us through the lava tunnels left years ago by some ancient explosion. These tunnels are those in which you could walk barefoot. The trees, taking advantage of the year round moisture pouring through the pores, have sent roots deep into the tunnel, forming a hair-like network of webbing that can be followed from the front of the tunnel to its depths. My biologist's side thrilled!). It was a great week, playing and sharing with the kids (how fun it was to be able to speak with them, even in a limited capacity), and spending time with the

wonderful and generous people in the Harvester Group. I was struck by their generosity and I hope they know that they impacted more than just the Nicaraguans in their journey here. God is good and He provides exactly what you need when you need it: encouragement, accountability, a reminder of home, and a window into why you love where He has placed you. [\*I am 22 years old and most of the group I have known in some form or another for fifteen years or more. It was very enjoyable, now, to meet them and know them through "adult" eyes. A child's perspective is both genuine and skewed and it was a great study to find my perceptions challenged. We are made in God's image and it is important to remember that we are complex creatures and much more than the sum of our parts (cliché, I know, but true, I apologize to my English professors.).]

## Library 101

While not officially underway, the library is in the pre-stage of pre-stages. We are doing the leg work to make things happen. We have a location and a few shelves. We are pricing glass doors for these shelves to protect the books from moisture and various critters. We are looking at raising the roof to permit better air flow and improve lighting (this is not solely for the library; it is time to replace the roof, but the library will definitely benefit). We are cataloguing the books currently in our inventory and adding more as the books come in (Thanks to our sponsors in the States who are helping to supply this library through our \*Wish List: Little Benjamin, Nicaragua on Amazon.com - this would be a shameless plug for those who were thinking of getting involved but not

knowing how to be, just in case you didn't know]. We are waiting for a shipment of supplies that have been sent on a container to really get the book processing in order. As for the space, we need to raise the roof so we can paint the walls and install the shelves.

When we open, not everyone will have check-out privileges. This perk will fall to a smaller group of students who have proven themselves trustworthy and able to maintain things entrusted to their care (like books). They will be part of a "reading club to advance the literacy . . . "with ID cards and a membership roster. All students will take a Library 101 course to teach them how to care for books and how to use a library. There will also be an introduction for the teachers. We know that this will only get off the ground with God's blessing and the teachers' support and intentional use of the resources. Because reading is not part of the culture, the hope is to catch as many as we can while the library is a novelty and get them hooked on reading. We are stocking the shelves with all kinds of books, fiction and non-fiction, text books, histories, how-to books and more. Long term, I'd like to see the materials accessible to the wider community. We'll see. Keep praying that this ministry will be successful and meet a need of this community and that God will use it as a forum for ideas, discussion, and, just maybe, change.

## ¡Bienvenidos a Tipitapa!

Tipitapa is still my home; and like any home, it has its ups and downs. I am beginning to feel a part of the community here. I still get calls on the street, but some of these are now by

name and are purely of a friendly nature. I know my way around my sector of town and walk without fear, praise be to God. I am not reckless, but I am not hiding in the house, either. It is such a contrast from my previous experience when I visited here between high school and college. I was afraid of my own shadow. I spoke little and would go nowhere by myself. How boring. I much prefer my current way of living. Knowing when my foot hit the soil that I was here to live, not just to visit, changed my perspective for the better. When it is home, you have to be able to enjoy it and not simply tolerate it.

Our current adventure here is lack of water. We have had heavy rainfall throughout Nicaragua, which has provided ample water. Tipitapa has chosen this time to change the source wells and so water will be shut off for the next five days. Where I live, six. Because we found this out yesterday and because we had no water last night (some of Tipitapa did), our water barrels and drinking containers are not full. As far as drinking water, we should be fine. There will be no laundry done and no cleaning. We are hoarding water for cooking, bathing, washing dishes and flushing toilets.

On the plus side, it has not been terribly hot recently. I would go so far as to say the weather has been nice. So, as of now, I would say October is the month to be in Nicaragua.

## In the Works . . .

Women's study: We have a book in Spanish: *Extraordinary Women of the Bible*. Now I will talk with the church I am attending to see if they would be interested in going through it. If not that, I may see about trying it with the woman at the school. There are some great ladies here who love the Lord and

I think they would very much enjoy the time together and with God.

Gabriella: This young lady had a tumor removed from her jaw. The surgery went very well. She is recovered and is back in school (Praise be to God). She is catching up on her classes and is doing quite well.

From Tipitapa,  
*Ami*

## Praise

- sense of belonging and contentment.
- renewed sense of purpose (thanks to God for sending that Harvester group – a perfect combination of people)
- recovery of Gabriella
- God's Word was heard by the communities of El Serrano and Yolina
- a friend in Valeria
- health
- doors continue to open for the sharing of God's Word

## . . . and Prayer

- Spanish language acquisition
- encouragement for Marcus and Ann
- understanding of how to approach the needs of the women and children here
- guidance for a women's study
- that the churches will take a more active role as shepherds
- follow up by the pastors in the small communities that have just participated in the VBS program
- smooth sailing for the library
- continue to provide opportunities to talk about God with students and other members of the community
- health for roommate, Nadia
- success for the Bible Institute