

**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 a servant's heart and is also one of that group.

Leia, Rocky, Queenie, and Princessa: The four dogs that I adore (adoration is a fickle thing. I still appreciate them, but being perpetually in danger of being jumped on wears on one after awhile) and who have taken to me quite well (even Leia who likes no one!).\*Of the six puppies, one has a new home, so we are down to nine!

**Homeward Bound!**

I was at the Pearson's one weekend and Will and Amelia chose that movie for the evening's movie entertainment. It still makes me cry. This (unless something momentous occurs, which is always possible) will be my last Newsletter this year. I am heading back to the States in December and will be staying through New Year, so look for another edition come January.

I must admit this last month has been my toughest run so far as newness wears off and routine slips in. It is in the routine that I am realizing what is not here - namely family and close friends. I am so blessed in having new friends here, in having a place that is simultaneously challenging and comforting, and the close presence of a family that knows "home" too, and yet also has a home here. Still, as October dragged on (really, it is the longest month - the days must be longer or something), I began to miss home. This is a slightly new experience for me as I have never been away long enough to really miss it. Hmm. Anyway, I can happily say that prayers of loved ones, a few poorly written, whiny letters (from me - I can be quite poetic when I am in a funk), and a faithful Lord has quite brightened my spirits. The rain and muck has passed (it was a swamp during October) and hot days and cool evenings have settled in for however briefly they may last. For the record, lack of seasonal change has completely thrown my internal calendar (really, if I had no calendar, I don't think I'd know what month it is), but the transition between

rainy and dry is at least some sort of . . . variety (and in a few months I'll be longing for rain - fickle). I am continuing to pray for focus (dwelling on anything beyond your reach or control is sure to drive you mad) and that I will be completely present for the time I have. We have all spent an hour, an afternoon, a day, week, month, or year and wondered where it went and, more importantly, where we were for the whole of it. I don't want this time to be a vague recollection or a fuzzy beginning. I do not want to spend all my time dreaming and miss the life I am living (perhaps a bit melodramatic, but true, all the same). God uses people who are willing - and a person on autopilot is not cognitive enough to be so. Having shaken the cobwebs, I was ready for something - and God provided in a simple, but perfect, way.

### **Saddle Up Your Horses**

All right, so there were no horses except those under the hood and the two pulling the wood cart down the highway, but I was yet again on the road. This time, Marcus, Ray (sort of Marcus' right-hand man), and I were headed for Somotillo. Anyone who has kept up with these ridiculously long email newsletters will know that no trip goes without a hitch. We had two: 1) we got stuck at the bottom of a hill in mud and creek sludge, with still the creek to cross and 2) we got stuck in the middle of the river with water about knee high. This is funny, because I think the second might have been my fault. God has a sense of humor - really. I did not want to get horribly muddy in our first stick, and so was a bit squeamish in spite of wearing my hiking boots. So while I avoided too much mud, I did end up soaked to my thighs with silt in my boots and soggy socks just the same. See, God has a sense of humor - no mud, but plenty of water. Anyway, thanks to several men who were willing to get muddy and wet, we made it to Somotillo and beyond. We were there to deliver four sewing machines, three bicycles, and several boxes of tool-sets and coloring books to the churches in the area (when I say area, for some it is half a day's walk to get there). It wasn't the giving away of material goods that was so striking - it was something Marcus said in the process. Roughly translated, it came to this: We know that this is not enough to meet all your needs or to solve all of the problems in your churches and in the lives of your people. The people that sent these things do so that you will know that you are not forgotten. These things are encouragement for you from your brothers and sisters in the States. You are not alone". So simple, and yet so true. We need encouragement - and we need to recognize it in whatever form it takes. Here, it came in the form of gifts. Other times, it is a letter from a friend and a smashed bottle cap, a hug, a stranger in the street that stops to say thank you, a song that is just right, or that Bible verse you have read so many times but is suddenly new. Marcus' words were that for me as I hope the sewing machines, bicycles, tools, and coloring books were for our fellow Christians near Somotillo. Keep this group in your prayers this month. There will be a workshop in December to continue growth within the body there, to bring encouragement still and a fresh perspective to the Word of God.

### **Tick Tock goes the Finals Clock**

The academic year here runs from the end of January through the end of November so we are end the very familiar end of the year crunch! The students are anxious for the break, worrying over final exams, promotions, and the usual stresses of end of the year. The teachers are making a mad dash shove the last of the curriculum into minds already on vacation (the slam of too much material at the end of the semester is universal, it seems). The office staff is preparing for promotion ceremonies. Gowns, pictures, the works. I am a bit on the fringes, watching as though through a camera lens - and sometimes actually through the camera lens. As far as

English classes go, some of the students are doing great and some aren't. I never understood the bell curve of grades, but I am seeing more and more that it is an apt description. I look forward to next year, having the students for a full year, and all of us getting started without the awkwardness of "the new teacher". Hopefully, we will better understand each other's expectations. Coming in, I was at a complete loss as to what to expect, and as such, I was idea-less. Now, I can say I have some bursting at the seams that I cannot wait to try out in the coming year. I'll keep you posted as to how they work.

\*Funny story. Yesterday, Tuesday, I got back into Tipitapa from Granada in the morning. I was planning to go to the school for the afternoon session to work on the library and review one last time with my classes. Surprise! One of the guards from the school shows up at my door to ask me if I have my tests. Today is the English test for 1st and 2nd years - didn't you know? No, I was told Thursday. Well, they're today. Ok, I am coming now. All right, I'll give you a ride. Are you sure? Yes, of course. - so we set off on a bicycle. Unfortunately, we didn't make it very far. The bicycle broke - the front wheel separated from the bike - and we landed in the dirt. I was and am fine, only bruised and scraped. My guard friend was not quite so lucky. He hit his head on the bike somehow and received a nice gash above his eyebrow and a picture worthy black eye. A good Samaritan took him to the clinic where they bandaged and stitched him up. So aside from a lingering headache, he insists, he is fine. The injuries are not funny, really, but he is such a trooper about the entire thing. The ladies at the school were properly shocked when I walked in covered in dirt and bike grease. Their teasing on my late arrival died on their lips to be replaced by a bar of soap and a human blockade so I could be properly cleaned-up. All in all, everyone, even complete strangers in the street, have been very solicitous in asking after our health. Right. It really was funnier in the happening than in the telling.

### **No More Pencils. No More Books!**

Ha, ha. Not quite. The library is growing and I am not ready! What a lovely, if sometimes overwhelming problem. I don't think I paid close enough attention when my mother took on being our church librarian. I seem to have blocked out the fact that we had a room full of books for over a year as she diligently plowed through box after box after box. Maybe God blocked that out of my mind. I don't know. As I get further into this project, and realize how much more there is to do, I am becoming slightly overwhelmed - but happily, not discouraged. I am just as excited and optimistic. I don't know that we will open with our full library for the beginning of the next year, as I had hoped, but we will hopefully be operational and adding to the collection as we go.

I am trying to get in touch with a librarian who runs a lending library in the Granada. Lending libraries are not common practice here, so I want to know what kind of troubleshooting I should be doing (and where she buys her book repair tape!). Usually, libraries are more of book warehouses where eager minds can come and use in house, but the books never leave (with permission, that is). We are shooting for a true lending library at the school, beginning first with the teachers and students. We recently opened the container, sent via the NICE Foundation, and found a beautiful supply of stuff to get us started (Thank you, Harvester Christian Church Library). Right now, this is a one-man operation, but the director of the school is fully on board and recruiting help. I am plowing away and the pile is starting change from the "Oh my goodness what are all these?" to the "Let's play with stickers (that still need to be typed and

organized)!" Having a library in the school is a great asset to the students and the community as a whole. The Nicaraguan educational department is pushing towards libraries in every school - we are blessed to be one of the forerunners. Pray that things operate smoothly. There are lots of little things that need to be done: fully processing the books, training librarians/assistants in book and resource maintenance, building a bookshelf, etc. Be praying that our hands move fast and that we will be prepared for whatever snags we may encounter. A library is yet another way to open minds and opportunities. Thanks for all the support and help thus far. If you want to be more specifically involved, check out our Amazon Wish List under "Nicaragua: Little Benjamin".

*Our Library Wish List:*

1. Glass doors for the book shelves to keep books visible while also protecting them from dust.
2. Tile floor to make the space easier to clean and more inviting for patrons (flooring is concrete now).
3. Work tables and comfortable seating for the working and lounging student/teacher.
4. Equipment beyond books - namely projectors, screens, transparencies, etc. These would be a great asset, especially as most classes don't have books for all students. It would make in class work that much more interactive. If you happen to work in a school or know someone who does, this is specifically for you. We would love to look into acquiring projectors, standing screens, transparencies, etc. I am also looking for Spanish-English dictionaries.

**Alambikambang, Here We Come!**

What is a month in Nicaragua without Alambikambang? I was lucky to be able visit again a few weekends ago. It was a very low key visit, mainly to let Marcus check on the barge (this is a construction project that, when operational, should open up travel on the river for education, commerce, and ministry by making travel accessible and affordable. (Ideally, anyway). I went along largely to help grow my familiarity with the area and because I like it there. So much of the projects here are leg work. Because regions can be very remote, it is left to going in person to get things done (internet and cell phones are not everywhere . . . yet). Marcus is introducing me bit by bit to his network of people that help make things happen. We will be heading out once more before leaving for the States. It will be a quick trip, if all goes according to plan and, Valeria, one of my favorite people here, will be going as well. Pray that all goes smoothly - missing a flight is just a pain.

**In the Works . . .**

Right now, most projects are winding down and regrouping for the start of the New Year. Classes are ending now and will resume at the end of January.

The Bible Institute continues to have classes and from what I understand, is growing.

Alambikambang has its own troubles, largely from lack of accessibility. We are trying to see how God would have us reach out to that community.

Gabriella: She continues to heal from the first surgery, though had to have another only last month to repair the surgery as the implant had begun to slip. She is still attending school and will finish out the year with her class. Praise God for that!.

From Tipitapa,

Ami

### **Praise**

- renewed sense of purpose (thanks to God for sending that Harvester group - a perfect combination of people)
- recovery of Gabriella
- 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
- 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
- peace for everyone as the school year comes to a close
- success for the Bible Institute
- Alambikambang.

### **Odds and Ends**

According to Nicaraguans, the little white marks on fingernails tell how many lies the person has told!

Alcohol stops the itch when it comes to mosquito bites.

In Nicaragua, oatmeal is not a meal but a beverage. Fill your glass a quarter to a third full of oats. Add sugar to taste (here, they add lots). Pour in cold water and stir vigorously! You may need to stir as you drink as oatmeal will settle.

In the tribal lands of Nicaragua, individuals do not own property, but they own the structures built on the land.