

## Nicaragua

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# ***The Foghorn***

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## *Cast of Characters:*

Marcus and Ann Pearson (Will and Amelia): The missionary family who have been serving here for many years (Marcus since '91). They began the school in Tipitapa ten years ago as a preschool. It has grown, now, to include a full primary and partial secondary curriculum. Among their various projects is a Bible Institute to educate ministers and church leaders throughout Nicaragua and a goal to share the Jesus Film in Miskito with the 19 tribal communities in Principolka.

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.

Jessenia: Assistant Director at the school. She is studying Computer science at the university in the evening. She and her family have opened their home to me and I will be staying with them for the remainder of my time here, Lord willing. Her sister, Marta, and I are teaching Sunday school together at the church. Angela, Jessenia and Marta's mother, has adopted me into the family.

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.

## *¡Esta Perdida!*

No, I am not lost, though it may seem that way from all you have heard from me – for that, you have my sincere apologies. The “lost one” was very much what I was called when I returned here to Tipitapa at the end of June. My May visit became a much longer stay than anticipated, and so my absence here was that much longer, too. For those who do not know, I stayed stateside to try to figure out why I am losing sensation in my toes – after a couple MRIs that of my brain that showed as yet undefined somethings, and a marked lack of curiosity by the doctor (my opinion, of course), I decided to hold off on the spinal tap and venture back here, to Nicaragua. I very much enjoyed the first part of my visit home, but near the end it was quite obvious that where I ought to be was not in my parents living room (though, really, how lovely is a comfortable couch!). So, I got an okay, you'll probably be fine since whatever this is, if it's anything at all, is probably slow-moving, from the doctor and re-booked my flight.

I hardly feel that I have been back at all, though really I am just a few days shy of a month. Spending so little time in one place thus far has skewed my sense of time. The first few days I spent with Ann and the kids in Granada. Apparently my absence was noted by the little ones as when the time finally came for me to return to Tipitapa (a return of only a few days because we would be leaving again for San Carlos and El Castillo), they asked if I was going back to the States and if they wouldn't see me again until December! It is quite nice to be missed (granted, I am the only one around aside from their parents that can speak to them in English, but still). So back to Tipitapa and my home here, albeit briefly. Home long enough

only to unpack and change my bedding, I soon set off again. This time, for San Carlos and El Castillo!

## *El Castillo*

San Carlos is a lakeside town that is growing and seems to be developing itself in the hope of drawing a tourists crowd. The wharf area is home to a wide open space where residents spend early morning and late evenings (the problem with open spaces is that there is no shade, rendering them nearly completely useless during daylight hours). The town is nearly opposite of Granada, just around the other side of the lake, which being so large, can sometimes seem much more like the ocean – probably not to any oceanside dweller. We arrived around 5:30 and looked for a place to stay that would also have a place for a vehicle to no avail. We eventually stayed, on recommendation of some Hollandaise tourists, in a small but clean hostel. The street leading to the place was under construction, so the truck was left under lock and key at the dock. I met a young woman, a tourist, at the hotel. She was working on the computer just outside my room. We struck up a conversation, which including why we were both here. As often happens with talks about God, we moved into deeper territory. Our conversation took on a theological side – largely spurred by her questions and challenges. Did the name “God” matter? Would not the higher power recognize sincerity, even under a different name, such as Allah or nature? And so we shared a bit, her beliefs and mine. To the assertions of Allah as another name for the same god Christians and Jews call “God”, I referred to the holy books of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (the Torah, the Bible, and the Koran). Allah, as described and characterized by Islam's own sacred text, differs greatly from God as characterized by the Torah and Bible. We agreed that using their own texts as a start off was fair treatment for such a question – on so were able to continue our discussion. She then reminded me that you could find God in nature, and so the worship of nature, too, would be the worship of God. To an extent, perhaps, but the danger, I replied, was in worshipping the creation, rather than the creator. It was a very enjoyable conversation, of the kind I relish – and I hope we both left having been heard. We at least parted company as friendly travelers. She, like many I meet, was here for a tour of Latin America, because it was the least expensive travel option that met her time frame. She was traveling with two others, Adam and Zack. While Zack used the computer, we other three played Golf – a card game in which beginner's luck held – I won. We all called it an early evening as their party was heading to Granada via the ferry and mine was headed to El Castillo via a river boat.

El Castillo is an old fort established by the Spaniards in the late 1700s. This small fort is most famous for its resistance to the pirates that made their way along the Rio San Juan in their pursuit of treasure and other nefarious activities. Now it serves as a reminder of days gone by and has since been designated a national monument of Nicaragua and appears on the 100 Cordoba bill. Once three levels of stone masonry, it now survives as only a hint of what it once would have been. The roof is long gone, leaving the uppermost level intact only near the cannons. Down a stairwell, and to either your left or right, you find the outer walls of the fort running the perimeter of the second story. No third story survives here, and as the majority for the center flooring is missing, you have a direct line of sight to the bottommost level below, home of the dungeon cell and the well. The moss covered dark grey stones have been softened and smoothed by water and sun. The beauty in the place is not in El

Castillo, but rather in its perspective. Resting atop a hill in a bend of the river, it has the perfect vantage point. It would be impossible to surprise. Small rapids in the shallow bed force any would be craft to slow its pace in order to make the bend, leaving the Fort safe and the vessel in potential peril. The river winds as far as the eye can see among the green trees and mossy hills. A house nestled here and there break up the foliage that eventually disappears into the cloud covered horizon. El Castillo has changed hands various times over the years, though nearly always with the same problems – hostility from the locals, lack of food and water, a lousy payroll, and the consistent threat of attack. Alas, in my opinion, it was altogether unimpressive – but perhaps I am an unjust appreciator of historical monuments. I have attended to one of Nicaragua's national prizes, which is a value of its own.

## Youth Camps

From San Carlos I returned again to Granada. First, there was laundry to be done. Having been gone for nearly two months, the layer of dust on my sheets was substantial, and I was loathe to wash them by hand. Ann, kindly as always, permitted the use of her machine. I was to stay through Saturday, so Ann and Marcus could have a much deserved night out, but sickness changed our plans. Ann and Will came down with some sort of bug, so I stayed as long as I could be helpful. With everyone on their feet once more, I returned to Tipitapa on Monday. Finally, I was to stay in Tipitapa, for a bit at least.

Tuesday through Thursday was filled with the delights of a youth camp at the school. The winter break was under full swing, but coming to a close, and these camps were to be some of the last events before the start of classes again. Valeria and Tita (whom I got to know last July and August before she left to finish her Bible education in Eagle Pass, Texas, and has since returned to Nicaragua), along with their sisters and other youth from the Cuerpo de Cristo church in Managua, put together a Bible camp for the older students at the school. There were three days of sessions, with the youngest group the first day and the eldest the last. The theme: hidden treasure. The treasure: the Word of God. Alongside sessions of Bible studies much like one would see at church camps in the U.S., the students encountered teamwork activities, challenges, and a much anticipated treasure hunt. The Beanie Baby prizes went a long way in inspiring participation across the board. The kids were up and active, asking and answering questions, and looking at their own worlds and perceptions via a biblical lens. It is somethings I hope the ladies continue to do – they, Tita especially, definitely have a talent for it.

I spent a brief weekend with Tita and her family in Managua. It was very low key as none of us felt particularly well. We had hoped to hit the beach or visit San Juan del Sur to see the sea turtles, but our lack of “animo” kept us closer to home. We – Tita, Cynthia, Sahira, Allison, and I – did go to Catarina, a scenic lookout just outside of Masaya. Let me share with you the local legend: lovers beware. *It is said that the lake is home to a mysterious creature. One night, two lovers had come to the lakeside. What stirred the creature, I do not know, but what emerged would be the last thing the lovers would every see. From the depths of the lake's center, in eerie splendor, came an enormous feathered serpent. Glowing in the moonlight, its sinuous dance soon brought it near the lovers, where it devoured them and disappeared again into the depths. The lookout barrier remains far above the lake's edge and locals still do not swim in the lake.*

I returned to Tipitapa on Sunday, much relieved to be home once again. Monday came and with it the arrival of a group, a “brigada” from the States. The Nice Foundation, run by Bill Beltz, is a non-profit run by a group of Christians who are dedicated to improving the lives of children here in Nicaragua. Their support helps make Little Benjamin possible. A group with the Nice Foundation came down – and it was a great group. Some of the men built a slide platform for the preschoolers, others painted the bathrooms (sky blue, very pretty), and the roof (red), and a few of the ladies in the group, two of which spoke Spanish, put together a VBS program for the younger kids at the school. Everyone worked hard and everyone did something. The women shared a prayer they had with me that morning: a prayer for something to help them communicate the stories of the Bible in a manner that the children could grasp. To their delight, they discovered our new library had just what they needed – and took a few books back with them to prepare for the next day. I enjoyed it immensely (I love the younger ages). I helped answering questions for the group, translating, initiating them into the workings of Little Benjamin, and serving in whatever capacity I could – and they were generous with their time, hearts, and gifts (some jumped in to help process books in the library). It was delightful and a great way to jump back into the school year.

## *Back in the Saddle*

The school year rebooted on Wednesday, the 15<sup>th</sup>. The library was fairly disastrous after the group left – there were light fixtures lying about and various construction materials from the fixed fans and new electrical outlets. Fixing that up took just a bit and then the kids were there again, reading. I had been gone from the daily runnings now for a few months, and I got the impression it was not widely utilized while I was away. Books were out of place, some a little worse for wear, and others altogether gone (I eventually found them in the bodega, who knows why). The morning crew was glad to see me, as I was them. Their first question was, of course, “can we come to the library?”. Smiling, of course, I say. I asked Alex to start looking for a librarian for next year, and barring that, at least someone I could start training, who could then show the new librarian the lay of the land. I’ll be traveling a bit more this next stint and I would hate to have the library close down for lack of attendance. Cross your fingers! As I said, traveling more this time and so one day after classes begin I am back on the road: this time, to Alambikambang.

## *Alambikambang*

Anyone who has been with me in this journey knows I love Alambikambang. It is rural, isolated, hard to get to, and an altogether different kind of life. Electricity is less than occasional. While Dud's hunting lodge can be almost resort-like (screens, full size beds with real mattresses, nice outhouses, a bathhouse with a door), life on the river is something from a hundred years ago. There is no electricity. You rise and rest with the sun. Rice is beat and the grain separated from the chaff. You pick fruit from the trees and eat it that day. Fresh coconut juice, picked green that savors slightly of a carbonated juice without the fizz, avocados, and bread fruit. It was a productive trip. The four-man group, John (who was with me on my first Alambikambang outing), Chip, Marcus, and I, found ourself in Galilea, a community just down river from Alambikambang. We stopped there first to let them now

we'd be returning that evening to show the Jesus film. From there we went a bit further down river to drop of a proclaimer, an MP3 device that plays the New Testament in Miskito. It can be charged via an outlet, solar panel, or hand crank – and so the Word is available, and hopefully, utilized. It is a pilot project and we are lucky to be part of its test group (thanks to some excellent persuasiveness by Dennis Dowdall in St. Louis). We shot back up the river to make plans with another community for October, and then returned to Galilea. Chip was our amateur photographer and recorded our activities. We played with children, handed out coloring pages and crayon packs, played Frisbee (apparently the best of which are the 175g – trivia courtesy of Chip), attempted to learn Miskito with children who were more than happy to teach, turned cartwheels, learned ballet, and a little bit of step. I get on well with the children and so soon had an entourage - and Marcus asked me to keep them away from the gear that was teetering precariously on the stage edge of the Moravian church. We played and just enjoyed one another's company. John and Chip showed themselves equal to the tasks before them (it was thanks to John that we had the Frisbees and beach balls to play with). Finally came the film – which is just as powerful the fourth, fifth, and sixth times through. The church was packed with more than one person outside looking through the windows. There were collective gasps in the scenes leading to the crucifixion. It is always striking to see which scenes resonate in a community, and it always seems to be a different scene. We closed late in the evening and retired to the tribal leader's home. His son, Julius, helped me string up my hammock (I am still terrible at it), and soon we were set up for the night. Between snores and a crying baby, I didn't do too much sleeping, but it was an altogether pleasant night. We woke early, passed a pleasant morning on the porch with the family, pulled out some yo-yos (I “walked the dog”, Daddy!), and chatted about this and that. The tribal leader boasted that the entire village was Christian – I don't know if that is traditionally Christian, as much of the States is, or if it is the personal relationship of salvation. I did not clearly understand from what the Judge, as the chieftain is called, said in response to questions or in response to the film. After leaving a copy of the Gospel of Luke in Miskito in almost every household, we headed out, still early, with our large gift-bag of avocados, waving goodbye to the community.

The trip back to an unexpected turn as John is an avid fisherman, as was our boatman, Sepharino. After many attempts, several locations, and once snapped line, John caught a fish. Sepharino was duly praiseworthy as John was clearly a capable fisherman (as evident from his first cast) and so many of those that Sepharino took out were inept (there Germans are especially bad, according to him). John was invited to return with his own gear in September or October when Sepharino could show him some really great fishing grounds. As it was, they returned to fish that day after dropping the rest of us off, though with no more success. The fish was excellent, I must say, and we had a very tasty lunch before setting off for Siuna and then Managua the following morning.

I made it home to Tipitapa on Sunday afternoon and proceeding, as usual, to do laundry (it is a never ending task!). Alambikambang cloths are always filthy and I can't abide truly dirty laundry just sitting around. I scrubbed and scrubbed until I was satisfied that all was truly clean. My jeans are still drying outside (rainy season and all). I will be here in Tipitapa now for a couple of weeks before heading out for a weekend in Acoyapa where I'll be giving a seminar for Sunday School teachers. Be praying that I communicate effectively there and that God will give me the words to share what He would have me share. I am supposed to

be singing in church on Sunday with the worship team: they want to sing in English. I love to sing, but am terrified to sing in public – this is coming as a real test of fortitude. I have had to push the date back a twice now due to travels – but it is on the calendar and it is not something I want to put off any longer. Ugh, my stomach is in knots just thinking about it! Nicaraguans sing with a very strong voice. Mine is nothing like theirs – really nothing. I have heard people say, not in reference to me but to people with voices like mine, that they sound like cats. So, great, I say. Bring on the cat – at least I'll know the words. Sing along with us on Sunday then. We will be praising the Lord and asking Him to “Open the Eyes of My Heart”.

“The Lord be with your spirit, grace be with you” (NIV 2 Tim 4:22).

From Tipitapa,

*Ami*

## Praise

- I am returned safe and sound and happy to be here.
- The library is still open!
- I have a place in the church and a growing network of friends.
- God has put a spirit of evangelism in the Church I am attending (this has nothing to do with me, but I am glad to be a part of it!).
- Valeria and Jacob are expecting!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (It's a high-risk pregnancy, so keep her in your prayers)

## Prayer

- Teaching seminar – that it will be everything that God would have it be, that I will prepare as well as I am able and that God will do his thing.
- Keep praying for the language thing, while it is definitely improving, I continue to need help.
- For a new librarian and/or assistant to replace me.
- Blessings for the church, Jeremias 33:3. They are looking to evangelize Tipitapa – for which Satan is sure to bring the heat.
- Health. It's cold season.

## *~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.