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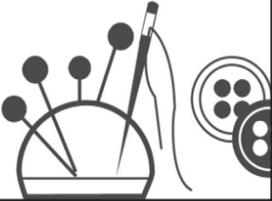
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## Living and learning in Nicaragua

By Bethany Beachum

The roads stretch, hot and dusty. Volcanoes rise on the horizon and, occasionally, the land gives way to expansive lakes and lagoons. Birds chirp and sing from some hidden place in the trees, and the scent of tortillas rises in the air. This is Nicaragua and my home for the past year of my life — a fact that still causes me to step back in wonder. Here in the capital city of Managua, I have had the privilege to live and work as a volunteer for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) since January of 2011.



Nicaragua, a country about the size of the state of New York, has a population of six million and is located in Central America. It boasts some of the world's richest biodiversity and natural resources, yet remains the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. CRWRC is the relief and development arm of the Christian Reformed Church of North America and has walked alongside communities in Nicaragua since the 1970s. The opportunity I have had to work with CRWRC in this country has broadened and deepened my perspective of the world, and I am thankful.

My parents, Rick and Cindy Beachum, raised me and my three older siblings in Fruitport, Michigan where I attended Fruitport schools and graduated in 2007. From there, I continued on to Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in a program called International Development Studies. I wanted to study this because of my curiosity about the world and because previous experiences in Mexican border towns caused me to question why there is a gaping divide between the rich and the poor and why my U.S. citizenship automatically granted me better opportunities than my Latino neighbors. I knew that social and economic inequality did not just exist across international borders but within my own country and where I grew up as well, and I couldn't ignore it.

In my years at Calvin, there were several opportunities to travel abroad in Central America where I engaged with more of these complex questions and developed my Spanish-speaking skills at the same time. After taking courses in southern Mexico, Panama and Honduras, I decided to spend my final semester as an intern with CRWRC at the Nicaraguan non-profit organization called the Nehemiah Center in Managua, Nicaragua. Besides learning as much as I could about community development work, my main responsibility would be to

research and write "stories from the field." I was thrilled because I would get to combine my passion for writing with my love for this region of the world.

So in January of last year, I packed one suitcase, said goodbye to family and friends, and boarded a plane to Managua with little idea of what to expect when I arrived. I flew home to Grand Rapids in May of 2011 to graduate with my classmates, and in July of 2011 returned to Managua where I have continued as a self-funded volunteer. The prayers and support of my home church, Fruitport Christian Reformed Church, have played a crucial role in making this volunteering possible.

My time here has been an incredibly rich experience. I have come to value, appreciate, and respect the strengths and challenges of another lifestyle and culture. And I am learning this with my heart, my mind, and all five of my senses (yes, this includes heartily enjoying Nicaraguan cuisine). The writing I get to do for CRWRC takes me on trips all over the country — from lawyers and doctors in urban communities to the rural homes of farmers in the central mountains all the way to traveling by canoe through the wetlands and river communities on the Atlantic coast.

When not traveling, I work out of the Nehemiah Center office in Managua. By participating in meetings, project planning, grant writing and program evaluations, I have been able to become familiar with the lessons and challenges of community development in a very real way. Whether out in the "bush" or back in Managua, I am finding that the relationships I am developing are perhaps the most enriching of all. Between friendships with co-workers and daily life at my host family's home, Nicaraguans have kissed, hugged, and laughed me to joy here. It is through relationships that we learn, grow, and are shaped, and I have recognized my need for community more so than ever here.

And so living in Nicaragua has taught me about non-profit work and speaking Spanish and theories of community development, yes. But it has also gone deeper. It has shown me human strength and faith in the face of poverty and injustice. And it has shown me that, underneath it all, I am just as vulnerable and in need of grace.

Although I am just three months away from finishing my volunteer term, I have decided to extend my time in Nicaragua. In August of this year, I will begin my second year of volunteering with part of my work concentrated in the wetlands of the Atlantic Coast. Throughout the year I will make several trips by plane to the coast to help with the implementation of an HIV/AIDS awareness program. Therefore, my learning certainly doesn't end here. I carry a whole world of relationships, experiences, and lessons in my heart now. And I can't help but see it all as a gift. These will go with me wherever I am and give me the courage to keep asking questions and keep an open heart.



## Pomona Park the site for eager Easter egg hunters

By Sue Johnson, Fruitport Lions Club president

The Fruitport Lions Club and FACE (Families and Community Engage) provided a very exciting day for our area children, parents, grandparents and the community in Pomona Park on Saturday, April 7 with a fun-filled Easter egg hunt for five different age groups of children, ages infant to 13. Finding the golden egg was the thrill when they started their hunt, to get the large basket filled with toys and candy that would be their prize.



There were three piñata contests, and the children all tried their hand at breaking them to claim the toys and candy inside. The Easter Bunny (Brenda Griffin) hopped through the park, delighting all the children, and an Easter egg coloring contest was held in the pavilion where prizes were also awarded. Two bounce houses were in the park and were always filled to capacity with laughing children. Six hundred hot dogs were served, along with hot chocolate and juice, to all in attendance.

We had approximately 400 area children participate in this event, and 300 pounds of candy filled their Easter baskets.

This event would not have been possible without



the hard work and planning of chairman Mike Johnson and Lion Bryan Gemmel, along with chairwoman Cindy Gaultney, 25 volunteers from the Journey Church, many Lions Club members and our community.

The Fruitport Lions Club and FACE would also like to thank Greg and Jan, owners of Ye Old Tavern, for donating the hot dogs that were served, RW Bakery and Ron Epplett for donating the hot dog buns, and Jennie, Stacey and Lisa from the Village Inn for donating the 36 dozen eggs for the Easter egg coloring contest. •



**Fruitport's eagles** are nesting again in the same location along Fruitport Road. They have been in this area for about five years, now. (Photo by Harry and Heidi Wojahn)