

NICARAGUA FIRST IMPRESSIONS

BY: RYAN LAVALLEY

It's hot. It's chaos. It's wonderful. So many new sights, sounds, and smells met us as we drove through the streets of Managua, Nicaragua. The smell of burning gasoline, oil, and other chemicals saturate the streets. The aroma of roasting beans, grilled chicken, cooking rice, and rotting plantains filled our noses. Bright blue, pink, yellow, orange, and green buildings spot the streets with signs in both English and Spanish. Political graffiti covers streets as well as the walls of the buildings. Between these colorful buildings, commonly lie shacks made of scrap wood and iron sheets or shack camps where a workers' strike is taking place. People are constantly crossing the streets, catching the city buses, old US school buses of tropical colors, decorated with Spanish words and messages. Street vendors can constantly be heard selling their products and approaching cars for money. This is truly "La ciudad del caos."

SCHOLARLY ACTIVITIES

BY: JOHN (JUANITO) HERRICK

Beyond sweating and complaining about sweating, we are here in Nicaragua to take classes. As we have often been reminded, it is an *Academic Service Learning Semester*.

Three days a week we have Spanish class with one of two professors. Classes are composed of one, two, or three persons. Once a week we meet for Central American Culture and Society and once for Service Learning Class. We take Central American History as a sort of independent study, and Theology and Social Justice along the same lines.

I find the personal nature of Spanish class very satisfying and conducive to learning. Though we have only just begun our classes, I suspect that an education in the U.S., even if of a high quality, is parochial enough to leave one ignorant of the history and realities of the Third World.



NICARAGUA GROUP WITH
FERNANDO CARDENAL, SJ

FAMILY LIFE

BY: JOHN (JUANOTE) FISK

After much anticipation, we met our families on the second day of our experience. We don't have a lot of space to write in detail about all of our families, but here is a list of who's with whom:

John (Juanito) Herrick – Doña Marcia

John (Juanote) Fisk – Martin Castro & Blanca Castillo

Jenna Hippensteel – Doña Nieves

Pat Convey – Doña Elba Tapia

Adrian Gonzalez – Doña Cristobalina

Alli Hays – Doña Marta

Ryan Lavalley – Doña Coco

Alejandro Mandel (faculty trip leader)-Doña Adilia Luna

Ann Marie Castleman (assistant) –Doña Francisca

Everyone is connecting with their families and having a great time. We are constantly eating, but luckily the country is a natural sauna and we sweat it all out. Please get in touch with us for more detailed descriptions of the families, if you wish.

OUR FAMILY NEWSLETTER

FIRST NEWSLETTER

VOLUNTEERING IN NICARAGUA

BY: JENNA HIPPENSTEEL

So we've finally decided on service sites, and have been to said sites three times since our arrival. John Fisk and John Herrick (Juanote and Juanito) are working at Olla de Soya (that means pot of soy), a supplementary nutritional site for children in Barrio Venezuela. Their culinary talents perhaps make them unwelcome in the kitchen, so they watch the kids who are there and make sure that everyone is happy and no one runs away. Ryan Lavalley and Pat Convey are working at La Mascota, a public hospital for children. They do a lot of arts and crafts, and they are perpetually covered in glitter (we suggested that fire might eliminate their shiny problem, but they didn't seem too keen on the idea). Adrian Gonzalez, Alli Hays, and I are working at Pajarito Azul, a residential facility for kids and adults with physical and developmental disabilities. Alli and I work in El Hogar de Ositos (the place for the small children), and we take kids for walks around the park. Adrian works with an adult group. He also walks with people in the park, and he swings and plays things like kickball with the people from his department (essentially, we also make sure that everyone is happy and no one runs away). We are all still getting used to the routine at our sites, but everyone seems content.



THE BOYS GAZING.

NICARAGUA: A DAILY LIFE
BY: ADRIAN GONZALEZ

A gentle knock on the door, with a very subtle, "Son la seis (It's six)" is how students in Nicaragua begin their day. Breakfast is served whenever you get up and guessing what is on your plate is part of the game. Stepping into the sunlight you wonder, 'how hot will it get today? 85? 90?' A cold glass of water becomes the only way to quench one's thirst. During the week we climb on to the old school buses that once used to take us on field trips, which now take us to our service site and back every Monday-Wednesday. Spanish class consumes our afternoons on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. Theology follows Spanish on Tuesdays; we meet with a Nicaraguan professor who conducts discussions based on the books we are reading for our theology class. We have a Culture and Society class every Wednesday during which we discuss different political and historical occurrences of Nicaragua. On Thursday evenings we meet for Service Learning, a class to further explore our service experience. On Saturdays we are fortunate enough to visit nearby towns and historical places of interest. Sundays are family days and homework nights just like back home (some things never change). On Monday the cycle begins anew.



THE GIRLS PREPARING TO ENTER THE CAVES

NADA IN GRANADA

By: Alli Hays

On January 30th we took our second weekend trip to Granada. This is an antique looking city about 45 minutes away from Managua, right next to Lake Nicaragua. We started our journey at the oldest hospital in Nicaragua; currently it is in ruins because it was set on fire and has suffered constant robbery. Then we proceeded to downtown Granada and visited the Merced Church and other museums, which helped us to better understand the colonization of Nicaragua. We then made our way to Lake Nicaragua and took a boat to a small island. From here we were able to go swimming in the lake. This lake is the only freshwater lake that has sharks; luckily we did not see any while we were touring the lake. We also visited the central plaza and witnessed many vendors selling Nicaraguan crafts. We look forward to our next adventure.

MASAYA / CBC

BY: PAT CONVEY

Our first excursion was to the city of Masaya, only thirty minutes outside of Managua. The city of Masaya has a rich historical history, as it is near Augusto Sandino's birthplace, Niquinomo. Masaya also contains many remnants from the revolution. One of these remnants is Coyotepe, a former prison to isolate and torture political prisoners by the Somoza family while they were in power. The prison is mainly underground, cut into the top of the mountain; it was there that we had our first encounter with bats. From Coyotepe we could see the Volcano of Masaya which was our next destination. The Volcano was thought to be an opening to hell by the first Christians that viewed it. From the top of the volcano we saw our first sunset in Nicaragua. It was a beautiful sight, watching the sun disappear behind the volcano. From the top of the volcano we descended into an underground cave that was used as a temple by indigenous people. This was the second place that we had an encounter with bats. While we were walking in the cave, Alli Hays was hit by a bat three times. She proceeded to crouch on the ground for the remainder of our time in the cave. After this trip we enjoyed a nice dinner at a small family restaurant. During dinner Eduardo stood up and said he had an announcement. He turned to Alli and exclaimed, "I was the bat." We all had a good laugh, and thankfully Alli cracked a smile at the joke and did not get angry with Eduardo. That following Friday, we went back to Masaya to visit a Christian Base Community. The Christian Base Community has many impressive projects that they are working on. Some of these include a law office for the disadvantaged, a primary school/daycare, and a nursery, among other things. Despite the lack of funds that they currently have, they are very dedicated to these projects and devote much of their own time and money to their continued success within the community.