

El Encaminador

Nicaragua 2009: Meet the Group

Anna Russell-Anna is a junior from St. Louis who is majoring in History/PPP. While in Nicaragua her service site is La Mascota and she is living with Doña Coco.

Michael Jonagan-Michael is a junior from St. Louis who is majoring in PPP. While in Nicaragua his service site is René Cisneros and he is living with Doña Ivania and Don Humberto

Jena Galster-Jena is a sophomore from Nashville and is majoring in special education. While in Nicaragua her service site is Pajarito Azul and she is living with Doña Marta. (Her husband Don Manuel passed away suddenly on February 16th. Please keep their family in your prayers.)



Paul Madden- Paul is a sophomore from Chicago and is majoring in History with a minor in secondary education. While in Nicaragua his service site is

Olla de la Soya and he is living with Doña Cristobalina and Don Renaldo.

Molly Rehak- Molly is a junior from Cleveland and is majoring in social work. While in Nicaragua her service site is Olla de la Soya and she is living with Doña Blanca and Don Martin.

Mary Renda- Mary is a sophomore from St. Louis and is majoring in PPP. While in Nicaragua her service site is Aldo Chavarría, a physical rehabilitation hospital, and she is living with Doña Marcia.

Josie Watson-Josie is a sophomore biology major from Columbus, IN. While in Nicaragua her service site is Pajarito Azul and she is living with Doña Elba and Don Mario.

Mary Knauff- Mary is a junior from Peebles, Oh and is majoring in international relations. While in Nicaragua her service site is La Mascota and she is living with Doña Nieves.

Erika Vickers- Erika is a junior middle-childhood education major from Cleveland. While in Nicaragua her service site is Aldo Chavarría and she is living with Doña Norma and Don Leonardo.

Michael Delaney- Michael is a sophomore Spanish major from Cincinnati. While in Nicaragua his service site is René Cisneros and he is living with Doña Adilia Gutiérrez.

Encaminar: The Translation

We are writing as we embark on an Academic Service-Learning Semester (ASLS) in Managua, Nicaragua. Through this integrated ASLS learning method, we hope to learn how to *encaminar* the people of Nicaragua. The translation of the word *encaminar* is “to walk with.” Whenever we walk through our barrio, “14 de junio,” our family members offer to *encaminar* us in order to accompany us through the Spanish-speaking barrio. Through these *encaminatas* we have learned about our community, logistically getting from one place to another, and have heard the stories of the people in our community. During these conversations, we have noticed that our new friends walk beside us, neither behind us nor in front of us. This applies both literally and figuratively to our semester here in Managua: we want to learn how to walk with the people of Nicaragua as we, together, discern how to best understand each other. This is why we are in Nicaragua. We want to walk with the people of this so-called “third-world” country to learn the meaning of the word “solidarity” because so much of our Jesuit education emphasizes the idea of solidarity. Throughout this semester we will volunteer at several different sites, complete coursework, and live with our Nicaraguan families in hopes that we can *encaminar* each other. We invite you to join us—to *encaminar* us—in this adventure as we explore the political, cultural, social, economic and historical context of Nicaragua and her people.

Masaya: The First Excursion

While in Nicaragua we embark on various excursions in order to learn about the history and culture of the different regions of the country. These excursions are a supplement to our classes and include both firsthand experience with various historical sites and amazing opportunities to speak with Nicaraguans. Our first journey was to Masaya, a center of commerce and history located southeast of Managua. Before entering the city we made a quick stop at the scenic overlook of Coyotepe, a former fortress and torture chamber which looms over the city. Upon arriving at the fortress we descended into the blood stained labyrinth of prison cells and interrogation rooms, used by both the Somoza dictators and the Sandinista revolutionary government. This site serves as a chilling reminder of Nicaragua’s violent history. After leaving the fortress we ventured to the top of Masaya volcano and while taking in the sweet sulfurous airs we learned about the geological upheaval that has formed the landscape of Nicaragua. To complete our journey we arrived in the city of Masaya and ventured into two marketplaces to explore the operational foundations of the Nicaraguan market economy. In the briefest of descriptions, the markets are a confusing array of any goods imaginable. At the end of the day, as we retreated to Managua, we reflected on our experience of the amazing history and culture of our new home.

DATES TO REMEMBER

February 20: Academic Service Learning Application for Over the Rhine, Ghana, and Nicaragua 2010 are due. For more information contact Irene Hodgson at hodgson@xavier.edu. ACT FAST!

May 1: Nicaragua 2009 Presentation at 4:00- BE THERE!



Culture Shock: Living in Nicaragua



In keeping with the name of this paper we invite all of you to try to “walk with us” during our time here in Nicaragua. In order to better help you imagine some of the things that impact our daily lives here we have made a short list of some of the most pronounced and different things that the Nicaraguan culture has that we, in America, do not.

Time: Time here in Nicaragua is completely different from back home. People here run on what they call “Nica time”. This is a concept that values what is going on in the present more than what a person has to do in the future. Ten minutes on Nica time can quickly turn into thirty minutes. Time is also very different when considering the hours used in a day. Here it is considered to be late if you wake up after 6:30 am and everyone in your house is assuredly asleep by 10:30pm.

Sounds: While we say that normal hour to *levantarse* (get up) is around 6:30, actually, we usually are all woken up much earlier in the morning by the hum of daily life. Daily life includes the woman walking through the street screaming “mangos at the top of her lungs, the roosters crowing at all hours of the day, dogs barking non-stop, busses honking and screeching to a stop, taxis beeping at you if you are near the road, various fruits falling onto the roof, the T.V. is constantly on, random people will call out to you as you walk by, cats will be fighting on the roof, the wind will be shaking your roof, and an assortment of various other sounds are all what make up the hum of daily life here.

Food: Food is a daily task here in the sense that each morning someone in the family goes out and buys what is needed for that day, but usually no more. Food is also a major part of the culture in that it is considered a social negative to be skinny, or to have skinny people in your house. It is a sign of status to be healthy and well rounded. For this reason there has not yet been a meal where any of us have walked away anything but stuffed.

Water: In America we take for granted the fact that every time we turn a tap water will come out. Here in Nicaragua the first question one has to ask when walking into the house is “¿tenemos agua?” (do we have water) If the answer is yes then hurry up and do what you need to with water because in the five minutes it takes to get ready for a shower the water might be turned off. If the answer is no, then re-plan the rest of your afternoon because everything you wanted to clean will have to wait till later.

People: Among all things that have surprised us in Nicaragua the people here have been the most surprising. It is not just the fact that everyone, no matter how famous, is willing to take time to talk to anyone/us, but it is during the normal conversations about things like dinner, where your mother might slip in a comment about what things were like during the revolution, or when her son was renting out bracelets made out of dynamite wire. Everyone here has an amazing story and everyone here is willing to share it. By simply taking the time to listen it is possible to make a new friend every day.

Schedule: What We Do

Now that we have been here for a few weeks we are starting to get more adjusted to our schedule here in Managua. We would like to share some of our daily comings and goings with all of you to give you a glimpse into our world here in Nicaragua, and what a beautiful world it is! Our week begins with work at our service sites on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings. These days are followed by lunch and afternoons of either Spanish classes or our Culture and Society class with Dr. Hodgson. Thursdays are a little different and thus begins the more spontaneous part of our week (changes in plans are frequent and as Dr. Hodgson calls them, “lessons in flexibility”). On Thursday mornings we go to the Benjamin Linder House, a center for dialogue amongst English speakers (commonly referred to as *gringos/gringas*) living in Nicaragua. Thursday afternoons are also occupied with class. Throughout the week, but specifically on Thursday evenings, our group meets to reflect together about our experiences on our trips, at our service sites and with our families. These frequent sessions for sharing our thoughts and talking about our feelings prove to be a constant source of bewilderment for our Nicaraguan

families- (“Why do those *gringos/gringas* like to talk about their feelings so often?” their faces seem to say). Fridays are usually filled with visits to different co-ops and organizations. This past Friday for example we visited a women’s co-op in a town called Nueva Vida, where they produce Fair Trade t-shirts and clothing out of organic cotton. Saturdays are filled from usually 7 am to 10 pm on various excursions throughout Nicaragua. Whether we travel by boat to visit and feed monkeys, or spend the day in our micro bus making miraculous U-turns facilitated by our fantastically talented driver and father to all, the one and only Martin, our Saturdays are filled with many adventures and even more learning. Probably the most integrated and sporadic part of experience, but also the most important is the time spent with our families throughout the week. The moments of joy for us seem to be when we have conversations with our mothers as they bring us breakfast in the morning, or bond with our siblings over *novellas* (soap operas), card games and dinner. Family time was awkward at first but now is something to go “home” to. Sundays provide an opportunity to spend the day with our families and to catch up on homework. As we settle into our routine we are now beginning to feel more at home. The days are moving increasingly faster with each day we fall more in love with Nicaragua. We hope things are great in your schedules and routines in your corner of the world!

For more information about Academic Service Learning Semesters or responses to this newsletter, contact Dr. Irene B. Hodgson at hodgson@xavier.edu or call 513-745-3541.

Featured Speaker: Mark Lester

As part of our Service Learning class we visit speakers who talk about politics, economics, and cultural importance relevant to Nicaragua. While providing a historical reference the topics also give us a present perspective and allow us to delve into them further. We are able to apply the work at our service sites and the insights from the speakers to achieve various perspectives and greater depth. One speaker that had a significant impact on the group was Mark Lester who works at the Center for Global Education here in Managua. Before

coming to Managua he provided us with a political and historical background on the country. Meeting him again in Nicaragua was interesting because of having this background and he provided us with more detail on the political situation since the 80's until the present day. One specific point of discussion in Mr. Lester's talk was the "pact" between the current president Daniel Ortega and former president Arnaldo Alemán. This "pact" was an agreement between the two men to protect the interests of their parties (FSLN, PLC) and of them-

selves. This helps us understand the differences between the political parties today and to follow more closely what is going on in recent news stories. We look forward to learning more about the FSLN party and the impact it has on the Nicaraguan people.