

Mission Trip: San Rafael del Sur, Nicaragua

March 28-April 6, 2009

By Darla J. Smith



Words cannot describe the joy that I received from this trip! I was truly blessed to take part in this endeavor. God went before me and provided not only financially, but physically, and for my comfort that I do not either deserve or “need.” He truly blessed our team with His presence and I have made lifetime friendships that will be for eternity! We taught English as a second language by teaching with a curriculum developed by our missionary team leaders Jody and Trisha Kennedy. You can learn more about Jody and Trisha at the following link <http://www.jodykennedy.com/whoweare.html>.

We first arrived in Managua, Nicaragua on March 28, 2009. We arrived and were met by Jody, Trisha and an interpreter Benjamin at the airport. We then loaded our luggage and off we went to eat lunch and to see the children’s home. Pictures of the children’s home will be provided later as I could not have access to my camera at the home and am relying on others for their pictures. The children in this home welcomed us with a sign and with enthusiasm that frankly US children do not understand. These children were authentically grateful for our visit and eagerly awaited the small gifts that awaited them. At the orphanage we left some provisions that we had brought along with some Easter eggs filled with candy that Trisha had prepared in advance. The children showed us their very modest and newly updated home. These updates included a new roof, tile floor (previously dirt floor) and kitchen. A visitor could easily see they were very appreciative of their new environment and that they do not take these things for granted. Getting into the Children’s home was a feat in itself considering the roads are not paved and during the rainy season ruts have been made in the roads which make for difficulty in maneuvering the bus. The other neighborhood children were playing football (soccer) in the background and the children were surprised at Mr. Craig’s ability to kick the soccer ball around with them. We took group pictures and prayed for them. I remember kneeling down on the dirt road on my knees in prayer for these precious ones, when all of the sudden next to me these children bowed in honor of our Lord with me. What a humbling experience! I am honored to have been able to go before God’s throne with such as these.

After leaving the orphanage it was time to go to our new living arrangements and our host church for the week. We arrived just before dark to our humble abode. These people placed us in their best residence. A member of the host church owns a small rental/hotel grounds that for them were of a great standard. Comparing to North American standards it had basic need, but in their sphere these accommodations were their "best" and we are very Grateful for their efforts in providing them. In some of my pictures you will see our bedrooms, etc. however, I will receive more pictures at a later date as to the outside of the grounds. We were able to meet the pastor and his family and receive our assignments for the next day.

Sunday morning the church had Sunday school classes in the morning time and we had registration for the ESL classes in the afternoon. Literally a couple hundred people showed up excited to learn English and excited North Americans were in their town. As we signed these individuals up for the classes Bob Meade and I were greeters and the others were in line to register the students and to administer placement tests to see where each individual were in their ability to speak English. We received the applicants and then it was time for church services at night. The general worship service on Sundays is held in the evening and we were privileged to sit in and worship with them. I tried to make out as many of the words that I could, but by not speaking Spanish I was pretty much lost other than what the interpreter could speak to us. My mind went to the Tower of Babel and I thought of the implications of that event.

After Sunday worship we were told where we were going to teach the next day and at what level. We went to our home for the week and found that the running water was not working however God provided us with wonderful buckets full of water! What an awesome God we serve! Nothing like a lack of water to make one realize how blessed one is to have water at all! My back had been hurting from the plane ride and I had not had a chance to see the Chiropractor before leaving for the trip, however God provided for my spine by providing me with a hard surface to sleep on. My bed was very thin and on wood planks, and I was wondering how I would get sleep when I am so used to the comforts of North American living. BUT God in His divine Wisdom gave me just the surface I needed to realign my back. My back actually felt better! Also, God provided a brand new mattress for me to sleep on two days later! He is truly amazing.

Monday morning we had two classes taught by Jane and Bob. I watched Bob and Jane to see how they conducted their classes as I was a newbie and was grateful for the opportunity to observe before having to teach my first class. The pastor's wife and some other ladies in the church literally worked 12 to 14 hour days to feed us and care for our dietary needs. They had to cook and clean in different methods for us as our bodily functions would not be able to stand the regular water that they had in their city. THEY WORKED diligently everyday and cooked on open fire and hand washed each and every plate and utensil. They worked before we arrived every morning and after we left for the day late at night. They pretty much lived in the outdoor kitchen area the whole time we were there! I am indebted to them for their diligence and care in providing us delicious food and a clean environment to enable us to work in our English classes. I went expecting to lose weight but think I actually gained weight from all the wonderful food these ladies fixed for us! The pastor served us night and day as well, making frequent runs to the store for water, snacks, food, and

provisions for our comfort that go way above and beyond what they normally experience for themselves.

On Monday afternoon I was able to introduce myself to all of my new students. Most of which were young teenagers and or young adult in my afternoon class. They were all very sweet people and genuinely wanted to know and understand English. Juan Carlos was a young man who was very eager and was a leader in the class. He tried to help the other students who had difficulty in pronunciation. Juan Carlos helped me on several occasions in getting the group to properly pronounce simple words such as fork, etc. Jonathon was a student whom in North America would be considered to be "cool." I had to work at getting him to participate; however, he would just smile at me with his cool smile and repeat the words I was trying to get him to say. My evening class was a very special group of individuals as well. They bonded with me and each other. In this class I had a mixture of younger and older adults. The older adults struggle much more with pronunciation and the younger generation helped out as best they could. They would especially try to teach me Spanish and had fun laughing at me when I could not pronounce Spanish words correctly! ☺

Everyday we would start out in the worship center for group singing and announcement and pronunciation with Trisha and end the session with singing and a word from Jody. Our song director was Jane Neal. I enjoyed all of the songs however most everyone enjoyed the song, "I Like Bananas, Coconuts, and Grapes" the best. I discovered Jane Neal (a beloved Retta Baptist Church member) and Trisha wrote this song years ago. It actually came from Jane's mom and dad's farm camp that they have around the Austin, TX area. The students would learn pronunciation through the singing. We also sang "This Land is Your Land, This Land is My Land..." however mid-week we added their local cities as a shock to them and they really enjoyed this touch. In fact, several of the teachers received t-shirts with the logo "this land is your land... Nicaragua!" ☺

Each day I grew closer and closer to my students in relationship and love for them and they with me. Jody had asked the students to ask their teacher to share their story with them and this was a time for each of us teachers to share our testimonies with our students. My students cried when I told them my conversion story. I was actually shocked at their reaction! I remember even Jonathon (Mr. Cool) was even moved and amazed at my story. They all seem to grow very fond of me after this and became very attached to me. I found it extremely difficult to leave them (although I missed my family very much).

On Thursday and Friday Jody and the local pastor shared the Gospel and offered an opportunity for them to respond. My heart went out to all of them in ways I cannot describe. One of which was not even my student! His name was Junior. Junior was Jane Neal's student, but I would go in her class and help her, so I also knew these students as well. Junior was a very charismatic individual. He was well liked by his peers and funny! He knows how to talk with his people. I started to pray for Junior (pronounced hunior), particularly on decision day. I specifically prayed for him during the first decision time. I prayed God would bring him to salvation and that Junior would use his charisma, personality and boldness to spread the Gospel in his community. Well, his class time was over and gone, however during the next class time I saw Junior come back and sit through another of Jody's Gospel presentations. I realized he was being drawn to God and could not bring himself to leave without speaking to someone. He was standing around after everyone else

had left and I asked him if he needed to speak to Jody or the pastor and he hem-hawed his way into saying yes, so I brought him to Jody and told Jody that Junior needed to speak to him. Jody realized that Junior had a past that brought him shame and he needed to work these things out. Junior did become a Christian and we are praying that he is accepted in the fellowship of believers at that church and overcome his past mistakes. I am praying God will raise Junior up to be used in that community in mighty ways.

Much more happened in this trip that I neither have the time to write nor the room to write. I find like John the need to preserve paper and ink. But some of these things that happened can only be experienced so I am in hope that the readers of this note will likewise step out in faith and see what God has in store for them on such a trip as this!

10 out of 23 students of mine accepted the Lord this week and a grand total of 96 from the whole school indicated a yes to receiving Jesus as their personal savior! We had 220 averaged in daily attendance! God moved in a mighty way and I will never forget the experience in the foreign mission field. I am first of all grateful to my Lord for allowing someone like me to serve Him in this mighty way. I am also very much thankful to my church Retta Baptist for giving me a scholarship. I am also indebted to individuals who funded me to go on this trip without which I would not have been able to attend. This work was just as much theirs as mine as we partnered together. I also want to thank Pancho and Jane Neal for nagging me to go (especially Pancho for hammering me every chance he could get☺). I realize that God will provide for His work and His children to further His Kingdom! I just need to step out in faith to do so! I am forever indebted to Trisha and Jody Kennedy for their long hours and hard work they dedicate to our Lord and His calling on their lives. I hope the Lord will enable me to go on many more trips with them in the near future. To God be the GLORY!

His Possession,

Darla J. Smith