

Nicaragua's Update – February 15, 2003

Cobb's Family Nicaraguan Stories

Dear Friends,

Its time for another update from Nicaragua. We have lived here five and a half months and are 3 and a half months into the dry season here. They call this summer. It runs from December to May when the rains start again. The rainy season is called winter and is May through November.

We continue to settle in here and our lives take on more and more semblance of this being home. Amanda has started school. We enrolled her in a Spanish pre-school called Kiddie Stop. She started January 23 and its totally Spanish speaking. She loves it and was singing in Spanish last night in the car on the way to a new favorite restaurant, Narcy Pollo. She is moving along leaps and bounds ahead of me. One night last week she was telling me to get a "globo" so I ask what it was. Without missing a beat, she said "balloon." It's amazing how fast kids learn language.

Amanda has made many friends at school as well and other playmates outside of her school. It's fun to see them play. One of the friends is Ally. They were born 3 days apart and are about as alike as two individuals can be. They do the same things, eat the same, dance the same, and act the same. They are two peas in a pod.

I always ask her about her day at school. One night at dinner she tells me that "some poo flew over me today and I cried." I thought, "What's going on that that school." This was before I knew one of her friends is named Sung Pu. The school is great and Amanda is potty training as we speak. Going to school really started the desire on her part and it's wonderful.

Carol is still the best Spanish speaker of the house, but Amanda is catching up quickly. I am falling further and further behind, but am actually learning some Spanish finally. We have a teacher that comes every morning and I take class from 7:00 to 8:00 and Carol from 8:00 to 9:00. This is working well now since we ask her to come an hour earlier since I was missing a lot of classes with meetings in the mornings.

Amanda is adjusting well. She loves the foods here, especially mango. We are actually afraid she might turn into a mango. The neighbor's yard all have mango trees and they are falling off by the hundreds into our yard and driveway. No shortage of that fruit here. I really like the green mangos (before they are ripe) with salt on them. It's a real hit with Amanda too. There are 20 different varieties of mango, just like apples, and we are getting to know the nuances of them.

Carol and I did some landscaping work in front of the house one day. One of neighbors heard that we had done the work ourselves and had to come by to make sure that it wasn't a dreadful lie about us. I could imagine what she was thinking. "You mean you dug the

holes yourself,.” I actually miss doing the yard work and am happy when I get the chance.

Carol and I are becoming famous as the pizza grillers. We have folks over about twice a month now to grill pizzas on the BBQ like Carol's brother Jon taught us. It's a lot of fun and the folks that we have over really enjoy it as well. The Zamora's are big fans of the pizza nights and their daughter, Monica, makes the best dough ever. She rolls it so thin it's perfect. We have tried some new toppings, one of which is mango, imagine that. Mango, cilantro, cheese, and hot pepper. It sounds odd but it's really tasty. One of our other friends took up the sport and introduced eggplant and tomato sauce to the mix. It keeps getting better with evolution.

I did get to see snow this winter. I was in the States for meetings at Marriott during the great Presidents Day Blizzard. In fact, we drove from Pittsburgh to Bethesda MD on Monday. It was incredible. Seeing all the snow did in fact make me a bit homesick, but after 5 days of it, I decided that coming back to visit snow is much better than having to shovel it. Got a little skiing in with my folks too.

Speaking of parents, both sets have now traveled to see us. Carol's folks came down in January and mine in February. Carol took them to all the sites around here and they had a great time. We took my folks up to the mountains to a coffee plantation/resort called Selva Negra. Its at about 5000 feet and was actually very cool, 50's in the night. The jungle there is incredible. Huge trees with howler monkeys way high up, and a huge variety of ferns, orchids, and “tropical houseplants” all over the place. It is definitely a place we will go back to.

The Russian circus came to town and is still here actually. It's called Russians on Ice. It's not quite what we would think of as a circus, but Amanda loved it. Basically it's skaters dancing, juggling, and performing magic tricks. They did have some clowns, and a Jungle Book theme part, but the hit of the night for Amanda was the skating bears. She loved them. One thing Carol and I found odd was the juxtaposition of Russian skaters, wearing red white and blue American flag outfits, playing American disco music, while we were sitting in a tent in Nicaragua. Globalization is occurring and we can't escape it, even here.

I finally got around to giving Carol her birthday present from last June. She wanted to see Mama Mia, the show that uses Abba songs. It was playing in San Antonio and we went up for the weekend. Carol and I had a great time. It is such a small, walkable city. The riverwalk is very nice and fun to stroll. Maybe part of it is that we really do miss sidewalks here and having a beautiful sidewalk along the river was really a nice treat. The other big attraction in San Antonio was Wal-Mart. Not sure it holds the same allure for you as it did for us, but we enjoyed walking just about the entire store admiring the choices of things. Everything is available here in Nicaragua, but the choices are limited. For example, hair barrettes for Amanda. We can get them here and they are inexpensive. But Wal-Mart has about 1000 choices, from Pooh to butterflies to strawberries. Same on many items and so we picked up some things we wanted. Nothing really that we needed.

We continue to try new restaurants. Most are very good, but we did have one interesting experience. We went to a Samurai steakhouse where they cook everything in the middle of the table in front of you. It's a good show with the knife twirling etc..... But they started the dinner with Italian Brucheta as the appetizer and a tomato soup after that. Once we got past the appetizer and soup we were eating Japanese, and really enjoyed it. Just thought the intro choices were odd.

Narcy Pollo, mentioned earlier is now a favorite because they have a rock climbing wall and playground that Amanda loves. The food is very good, rotisserie chicken, and the music is classic rock from the 70's and 80's. Something for everyone. It's in the next town over, Massaya where they have an active volcano and a great craft market. It's a nice drive to get there.

Other restaurants we have "discovered" are a churasco place called Rincon Criollo, not much for ambience, but the food is great. We enjoyed a place at the top of the ridge behind Managua called Monte Vista. They have a spectacular view across the back of the ridge all the way to the pacific about 40 miles away. Breathtaking. They have a playground too. The day we were there a bunch of bikers (motorcycle) pulled in riding through Nicaragua from Costa Rica. It was interesting as they were mostly retired Americans who live in Costa Rica part of full time and ride around on the weekends.

Carol wanted me to include that she is tired of me taking her the best food restaurants and wants some ambience. Well tonight I did and she is very happy. Harry's Argentinean Steakhouse was a hit with her. (even thought the best beef in Nicaragua is at the food court in the mall at Guapinol) Harry's was great and we will be going back soon, I'm sure.

Carol and I also attended the wedding of our attorney here. Wonderful event. The ceremony was in a small church with standing room only. The reception was up in the hills overlooking Managua at a delightful restaurant called Intermezzo. We will have to get back there during the daytime to enjoy the view, but for the wedding the lights of Managua were an exquisite backdrop. It is true what they say, Latinos love to party late. Dinner was served at 11:30 and the party was just beginning. We ate and ran and were home by 1:00. I hear they were still dancing at dawn.

Recently I officially transferred my membership in Rotary from Shepherdstown to the Managua Tiscapa Club. I gave a one-minute thank you in Spanish. It was fun and everyone clapped. I hope they could understand my very poor Spanish.

Easter week is coming and that is another big holiday here. I'll let you know what that is like in the next update. I will also be e-mailing a project update because so many of you ask about it. If you prefer not to receive it, please let me know.

I want to end by telling a joke on myself. Probably the first of many.

Right after the first of the year, I would sign all my e-mails with "Felice ano nuevo" or "Happy New Year" in Spanish. Being a novice to the keyboard, I really don't know how to make the "n" with the squiggle over it called an "en-ye". Only after 20 or 30 e-mails did my assistant Marvin see what I was writing and informed me that "ano" without the "en-ye" squiggle was the word for anus. Go figure, I'd been wishing all of my Nicaraguan friends and business associates a happy new anus. I guess they all felt sorry for me after they quit laughing because no one ever said a word about it.
Be well and stay in touch.

Come visit when you can.

Mike, Carol, and Amanda.