

Mike Cobb's **Gringo Life** – April 2005

Dear Family and Friends,

Carol, Amanda, Emily and I attended our 7th Annual Presidents Week event in Belize last month. The event is held on Ambergris Caye and there are no private cars on the island, so golf carts are the rental vehicles of choice. Joel Nagel had his family there as well and his 2 oldest girls, Mary 11 and Annie 5, became inseparable from Amanda and by association Carol, Emily and me as well.

The trip to Belize has given me a very clear vision of my future for the next 18 years. I was the chauffeur to 5 women for 12 days. I nicknamed my golf cart estrogen mobile. I now understand that this is my lot in life and it will take some getting used to. I see the progression from golf carts and ice cream last week to soccer games and movies in the years to come. Then they'll go off to college and I'll be reminiscing about the days when it was me driving the girls around. Need to enjoy the experience.

I am also trying to become accustomed to the conversations and games that little girls play, like "Little House on the Prairie", or paper dolls, or beading, or just plain old house, or princess or... well you get the point. It is a stretch for me to get "into it" but I will continue to try for their sake (and mine as Carol likes to remind me.)

Carol loves being a mom, although I do know it is difficult to hang in there all day. I was sick a couple weeks ago and spent the day in bed. I could hear everything going on and on for hours on end. If I had her job, I'd eat a gun.

I really appreciate the work she does everyday playing with the girls and helping them learn and grow. Teaching values is a slow patient process, and Carol is well suited to it. The more I see and know, the greater my admiration and appreciation for Carol and the hard, slow and vitally important work she is living 24/7.

Amanda has been taking all kinds of lessons, horseback riding, swimming, ballet, jazz and now soccer as well. Both she and her mom had a big scare a couple weeks back when the horse that Amanda was riding broke from the group and started galloping full speed back to the barn several hundred yards away. Amanda kept her wits about her and held on tight. Mom was a little freaked out. But just as the old adage says, Amanda was asked to get back up and ride again. They found her favorite, Caramelo, and she got back in the saddle and rode for another half hour. That kind of tenacity makes a dad real proud.

Soccer is the newest thing she's into. She's usually the only girl with about 15 boys between the ages of 4-6. I must apologize in advance to any feminists who are reading this. Boys and girls are not equal. Not even remotely. They are very, very different. The boys run full speed 100% of the time for the entire hour. When they are supposed to be standing in a line, they are running around, when in the few moments they are not running, they are wrestling on the ground. Amanda walks, although dad suggested that she jog, and waits patiently in line etc... I'm certainly glad that she has the equal right to play, but she will never be equal to, and always be very different from the boys and that is a wonderful thing.

Emily is just now 8 months and really is starting to take on a personality. It is amazing how different 2 kids can be, even at such a young age. It's not like she has a different diet than Amanda. They are/were both breast fed. They are just wired so differently. She also got 6 teeth in the space of a month and loves to use them. On people. Mom mostly, but me occasionally.

Amanda gets a different kind of torture. Emily wakes up first usually and loves to find Amanda and pull on her hair. It's already starting. Lines down the back seat of the car are next. She is also

now crawling which started about 4 weeks ago. Almost immediately, however, she began standing up and cruising around coffee tables and sofas. She has let go a couple of times too. Gravity testing I'm sure.

There is a growing sense that I am slowly becoming Nicaraguan in some little ways. Gail Geerling, a friend of mine here, mentioned over lunch something I had seen but never paid attention to. (Funny how we can see something over and over but it never registers.) People here point with their lips. I know this sounds strange, but they do. I do too now.

Try this. Pucker up like you are going to blow a kiss and then point your lips in the direction of something. That's it. Well when Gail mentioned it, I immediately recognized it. It was only later in the week when I caught myself doing it, did I realize that I had started. It's nice to feel at home here.

Just had a wonderful weekend showing some folks around Nicaragua. If you have an interest in what we are doing, or an interest in Nicaragua in general, consider making a visit. I know I say this every time, but you just can't imagine what it's like here until you've seen it with your own eyes. Everyone who has been here is very pleasantly surprised and immediately sees the incredible opportunities of being a part of this remarkable transformation of a country.

Two other quick things. A very good friend of ours has started a hammock exporting company and they are exceptional. They are working with local producers and are hand selecting the hammocks before shipping to ensure the highest quality. She has a new webpage and you can check out the offerings. They have a distributor in Florida so getting one is easy.

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A different friend has told me that you can "snowboard" down one of the active volcanoes here and I'm going to go sometime soon. It's a cinder cone so you are sliding on ash and pumice. Falling will be painful I'm guessing, but assuming I survive, you'll get a full report with pictures next time. Any takers?

Enjoy the newsletter and be in touch with your thoughts and comments.

Mike