

Mike Cobb's Gringo Living Sep - Oct 2006

Abraham Lincoln said that, "A man is about as happy as he makes up his mind to be." I was reminded of this by an e-mail from a friend who lived in Nicaragua for about 6 months and who recently moved back to the Indianapolis area. His comment really struck me in a powerful way and it has a lot of depth to it.

Dear Mike,

I notice that in Nicaragua I was able to see everything as part of an adventure. So when bad things happened (e.g. a flat tire), it was just part of the fun. But in the U.S., a flat tire is not part of the adventure. It sucks. The trick is to now see everything as part of a grand adventure. We all won the lottery by being alive, so just enjoy every moment of it!

Thank you Reid. This is a great perspective and sometimes you have to be on the outside looking in to get a glimpse of it. Not an easy place to get to, but certainly worthwhile. As Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth leading." So, we'll keep examining.

Along those lines, a few weeks ago I found myself saying, "I really like this place." That particular evening, I was enjoying a fine steak in a lovingly restored mansion turned hotel. Leon is a colonial city founded in 1526 and Los Balcones, my lodging for the night, is almost half that old.

This grand home originally built in 1814, now provides 22 classic rooms, furnished in 19th century accouterments. In fact, Carlos the owner has opened up a section of the old wall and framed it showing the brick and mud structure that, for almost 200 years, has survived fire, earthquake, electrician, and plumber. Just sitting there soaking up the atmosphere was exhilarating and peaceful at the same time. Strange sensation, but it's in these moments you realize that something about a place really connects with your character and spirit in a truly authentic way.

Nicaragua is a unique experience, and isn't for everyone. That much I've learned over the past 4 years of living here. But if you like powerful flavors, you can't help but discover them here. Just like the 50+ varieties of hot sauce now available in gourmet grocery stores, each has a subtle difference that makes it unique. Nicaragua's flavors are varied and different, but they all are spicy to the uninitiated tongue.

The last update mentioned that when we were in New York City, I felt a lot of similarities to Nicaragua. NYC is raw and unhomogenized. So is Nicaragua. I like the raw flavors of Nicaragua, but I like them in doses. I also like to be able to withdraw to the creature comforts of a nice shower and some ESPN Monday Night Football as well.

There's something to be said for having the best of both worlds. Our life here is truly, the best of both worlds. We have it in Managua now and are building it at Gran Pacifica. It's a wonderful feeling knowing that we are creating something that will provide this opportunity to many more folks in the future and create an excellent quality of life affordably.

In this addition of the Nicaragua Newsletter, you'll find the family update first, then into the other normal topics of interest. One thing that I won't touch on is the upcoming elections. We are guests in this country and our hosts are the ones who get to talk about and decide elections here.

Enjoy this edition of the newsletter, and as always, stay in touch.

Mike Cobb

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Family Update

Family First

We celebrated all 4 birthdays since the last newsletter. Emily turned 2, Amanda turned 6, Carol and I... well, better let that go.

Speaking of birthdays, dad got another great treat this year. Both of his daughters enjoyed a plate of boa constrictor with him for his birthday meal. I always enjoy ordering the wackiest thing on the menu and nothing makes a dad prouder than 2 daughters who are right there with him. Even Joe the Gran Pacifica Intern from Western PA tried a piece himself.



My birthday weekend was spent once again at Selve Negra, the coffee plantation resort in the northern mountains. Joe, our intern came with us and wanted to see monkeys. And boy, oh boy did we see monkeys. While dad, Amanda and Joe built a dam on a small creek, a troop of howler monkeys came through the canopy overhead. Joe took about 100 pictures and followed the troop up the hill and out of site. Amanda and I stayed at the creek where she got a primer in basic dam building and a full course on getting muddy. She aced both.

The big deal for dad this summer however, wasn't his birthday, but was his first business trip with Amanda in tow. In June I spoke to a group of about 50 folks in Colorado interested in Nicaragua. It was a presentation on a Thursday evening, and that was the extent of the business. Amanda and I stayed through the weekend and had a great time touring a gold mine, panning for gold in a freezing cold stream, taking an old train ride, and then hooking up with her cousins in Denver for some fun there. Amanda wanted to ice skate and so we spent a morning on the ice and had a really great time.



Emily also enjoyed her first business trip with Dad since the last update. We met a couple of our shareholders here in Managua for breakfast and then went up to Volcano Masaya to hike a bit. Masaya is a wonderful example of an active volcano that is easily accessible and offers some great vistas of the lakes, both Lake Managua and Lake Nicaragua. Pat and Warner enjoyed a longer hike to the rim of one of the higher vents while Emily and I threw rocks in the shade of an overlook pavilion. For Emily, a half-day trip was just about right.



Carol continues to love being super mom and the girls really are getting a special gift of her time, focus and efforts. There are frequent art projects at the house and some of them even get framed and hung in the dining room. She continues to lead the charge to get our new home built here in Managua dealing with architects, engineers, and kitchen suppliers. They tell us our house in Managua will be done before Christmas and the progress looks good. We'll see if we are in by Christmas.

The issue of language still amazes me. I am blown away by Carol's ability to deal with all of these people in Spanish. She is incredibly proficient now thus widening the bilingual gap between the ladies and myself. Amanda continues to learn German to be ready for 4th grade when they teach in German. It is amazing that she can speak English at home, Spanish at school and be learning German all at the same time. Emily may not speak a lot of Spanish, but she understands a great deal of it. Kid's brains certainly are sponges, as they say.

Our plans are to be in the US this Christmas and New Year for the first time since we moved here. It will be nice for a change and we'll try and get a couple days of skiing in as well. Carol thinks Emily is too young to ski, but I have a feeling she'll be on the slopes with dad anyway. I look forward to seeing some of you over the holidays.