

15 Days till Nicaragua!

APRIL 21, 2015 BY [JACLYN \(EDIT\)](#)

Hello all,

It has been a busy and exciting past 8 months of planning, organizing and fundraising the Nicaragua Immersion! The Moreau Center is gearing up to send 11 students and 1 faculty adviser on a three-week service learning immersion to Nicaragua. We will leave May 6th and return May 26th. During our time in Nicaragua, we will be working with two organizations: Witness for Peace (<http://www.witnessforpeace.org/>) and Seeds of Learning (<http://www.seedsoflearning.org/>). With Witness for Peace we will be learning about the historical involvement of the U.S. government in Nicaragua, current economic and political involvement of the U.S. government in Nicaragua, free trade vs. fair trade, take part in a 3-day community homestay in El Regadio, and visit the U.S. embassy. With Seeds of Learning we will have chances for cultural exchange and hands-on service. We will be working towards building part of a preschool classroom in El Progreso.

Although everyone is still working hard to complete finals and doing last-minute preparations, we are all excited for the upcoming trip and opportunities to learn more about a different culture and engage in service learning. Thank you to everyone for your ongoing support, both financially and emotionally, and keep checking this blog for posts starting May 6th!

Gracias,

Nicaragua Immersion Team 2015

We have arrived safely in Managua!

MAY 8, 2015 BY [LINDIE \(EDIT\)](#)

Hola and hello from the 2015 Nicaragua Immersion! I'm Chelsea, I'll be your blogging companion for the next weeks! We apologize for not posting yesterday, we were unable to connect to wifi. We hope that didn't worry anyone too much. But we made it here safe, we promise. I'll give you a quick update on our travel day yesterday, and our amazing first day here in Nicaragua today.

Yesterday was our travel day. We met at the University of Portland campus at 2:30 am and drove to the Portland Airport. We waited for hours and finally boarded our flight to Huston, Texas. When we landed in Huston we had an amazing 6 hour layover that consisted of a lot of sleeping, eating, and chatting. Finally we boarded our plane and flew to Managua, Nicaragua. Immediately we went to our hostel and slept.

Today consisted of amazing meals, as well as amazing testimonies and experiences.

Our day started off with a type of orientation where we learned about what we will be doing with Witness for Peace over the next few weeks as well as a quick history and overview of Nicaraguan history and local gestures and phrases to remember. We talked about fears and expectations for the trip, which was encouraging I think for everyone to understand that we're all a little nervous for this amazing adventure ahead of us.

After lunch we went out into the open air market to do a little socioeconomic contrast tour. We were separated into groups and were given family scenarios that represented the average Nicaraguan worker. From there we went into the market and bought food from our daily wages we were given. Its an interesting thing to see you know? To see what you can get for 3.50 US dollars (87 Cordobas) for a family of 6.

To continue with the socioeconomic contrast tour we went to the local large shopping mall that most all Nicaraguans cannot get to, as well as cannot even think about affording. As we walked around there were numerous shops that had guards, as well as shops that I wouldn't even fathom going in. As Audra, one of our group members stated, "It was like two separate worlds that were so close to each other."

From there we went to Pick up Yamileth, our first speaker, from her job at one of the free trade zones. We drove around her neighborhood that use to be the municipal dump, but then with the help of the Spanish president, they helped convert and clean up

the dump. Before the dump was converted, 1,200 families used to live in the dump, work in the dump, as well as use the contents of the dump to provide for their families. Once the dump was converted and privatized, many of the families that lived and worked there really had no place to go, and 60% of the workers at the dump now didn't even experience what those 1,200 families had to deal with. Then, we ended up at Yamileth's house where she invited us in and talked with us more about her experiences, what she does in the community, such as running a health center out of her home. A very empowering and wonderful woman to talk to, one that makes a great impact and gives everything she has to her community. "We're all called to serve, and if I'm not serving, there is no point." Yamileth.

After Yamileth's house, we walked over to an organization called Podcasts for Peace, which "teaches children how to tell their stories through digital story telling." We were lucky enough to see some of the videos the children made, and how excited they were to share them. It was something powerful, seeing the children put together some stories about their lives. One young girl made one about her being made fun of, but working her way up and realizing that she is strong and happy with herself. After we watched some videos we were able to play games and sports with the kids, which was probably the highlight of their day as much as it was ours.

Now, we've returned home, had an amazing dinner, and are showering! YAY! I hope this blog post gave you an insight on what we've sort of been doing lately, and gives you a peace of mind that we actually did arrive safe!

Signing off!

Chelsea Cook

8 de mayo

MAY 9, 2015 BY [VOLSTU22 \(EDIT\)](#)

Today we slept in a little bit later (7:30am instead of 7am) and had a delicious breakfast, which included glorious grapefruit juice! Then we learned about the international monetary fund and DR-CAFTA. During this session we defined neoliberalism as a general word that encompasses "the free market" competition and a level playing field,

but as we looked into the reality of the situation, it was clear that the playing field is not level. DR-CAFTA stands for Dominican Republic and Central American Free Trade Agreement. It created free trade zones where companies can renegotiate the standards and regulations that their companies need to follow – for example, tariffs, subsidies, and quotas. Unfortunately, this tends to benefit the big players in the system and hinders the small producers. This concept led to our activity called the “Power Flower.” We brainstormed various identities and which ones are generally privileged. Then, we reflected on our own identities and how we can be more mindful about our own privileges and how we treat others.

Next, we headed to a buffet in the city for lunch. A buffet is a bit different here. It means a restaurant where there are lots of food options, but you need to pay for each item you choose. Afterward, we went to Esperanza en Accion, which translated means Hope in Action. This is the place where Yamileth works. Here we heard more about the Fair Trade store from Yamileth and then had the opportunity to buy some goods too – there were woven bags, beaded jewelry, paintings, stone carvings, pottery, and braided baskets. Also, it was a beautiful area with a big courtyard filled with vibrant flowers, mango trees, and the sounds of various animals.

Our last meeting was at the private University of Nicaragua with two women from Jesuit Migrant Services, which works with family members of migrants and returned migrants. We learned about the different types of migrations: circular, pendular, interregional, voluntary, and forced. Circular migration is leaving and returning frequently to your home country. For example, coming home for the holidays. Pendular migration is when the migrants would travel to a different country for a season and then return after the harvest season was over. Interregional migration is within Central America. Voluntary migration is when the migrants leave their home country by choice, usually looking for better living conditions. Forced migration occurs in situations when the environment causes people to lose their home, if they are internally displaced, or if they are refugees. During the presentation, I learned about how disproportionate the age of the population in Central American countries are – about 40% being below age 18. Also, I was shocked by the extent of violence that migrants face and the fact that the government does not make an effort to create a system through which people can safely migrate,

but rather it creates stricter rules that prevent successful migration. This was particularly saddening due to the fact that many migrants are leaving as a result of unhealthy living conditions ranging from abuse to inadequate resources to meet their basic needs. Following this information packed session, we got some fresh air at a park nearby called Luis Alfonso. It was named after an eleven year old boy that was killed by the National Guard.

After a busy day we were all ready to get back to the hostel and have dinner. Dinner provided us with delicious sustenance and then we ended the night with a mini concert from Nineth and her daughter playing the guitar and the mombo, which is similar to a xylophone. We enjoyed the traditional Nicaraguan folklore music and also browsed her hand painted goods including cards, bookmarks, jewelry, wood crosses, and keychains. It was a great day and definitely tired us out. We are handling the heat, but boy is it an adjustment!

Feel free to respond to our blog posts!

Gabrielle and Mele

>>> Hi mommy! I am doing well and embracing all the new experiences. Give Louie a big hug for me! I love you!

* Hi mom and nen! I love you! Whoo!

Day 4

MAY 10, 2015 BY [VOLSTU22 \(EDIT\)](#)

Saturday May 9th

We would like to begin this blog post by taking a moment to appreciate one of Nicaragua's finest delicacies...the avocado. We have been blessed by its consistent appearance in our meals thus far.

Now, on to the happenings of the day. We woke up at 7 AM (courtesy of herder Audra ie ME) and we all were awakened by the pool of sweat beneath each of us. Yesterday, we didn't have the opportunity to meet with the ex banana plantation workers, so that was our first stop this morning. We had the privilege of meeting four ex banana plantation workers, and hearing their stories regarding the chemicals utilized on the fruit while they worked and how this has created various health problems for them and their families. The workers were unaware of the harmful affects that the chemicals (Nemagon) would have on them. Though, the large corporations knew of the serious health ramifications that would follow prolonged exposure to the chemical, yet they continued to ship the chemical to Central America. The chemical was prohibited in the US because of its toxicity and the workers were directly exposed with no form of protective clothing. The four individuals who spoke to us discussed how they and other workers have had their lives dramatically impacted by these toxins. Some of these conditions include kidney failure, early arthritis, loss of eye sight and hair, discoloring of the skin and various forms of cancer. A women was forced to have her uterus removed as a result of the exposure, taking away her opportunity to have children. We were disgusted by the actions of these companies, continuously sending these chemicals, making people sick, and doing so with knowledge of the affects just to turn a profit.

These four individuals have banded together with other former workers, acting as head representatives of the ex banana workers, seeking acknowledgement of the companies' wrong doing as well as help with their medical expenses. When they spoke there was no hate or revenge in their tones. They're not in search of an exorbitant amount of money, rather just what's needed to help them cover medical costs. The companies have responded by offering only \$300 dollars to each individual for their suffering. This amount of money is incredibly insulting to them and they would rather take nothing than accept that amount. Not only are the companies offering this ridiculous settlement, they are not willing to discuss compensation with the families of those who have already died or female workers. These people are passionate about their cause, but do not let hatred overcome their lives. Their perseverance in the face of adversity is nothing short of inspiring, refusing to back down until the companies admit their wrongdoing. The daily sicknesses that these individuals, and many more, have to deal with does not stop them

from pursuing their rights. I believe we all walked away feeling humbled to have been in the presence of these inspiring individuals.

Following this meeting, we went to Tiscapa Historical park to eat lunch and were able to look over the city. Next, we met up with Julia from Mesili sewing cooperative. This company came about when Hurricane Mitch hit and a few women began serving those affected by the flooding and land slides. These ladies made T-shirts and clothing after learning how to use industrial machinery. They only use organic material so that their workers are not harmed by hazardous chemicals. Now, they ship their products all over North America and Germany. For our final meeting, we met with Maria Ivania, a volunteer health promoter who operates a small health clinic out of her family home. Many people don't want to take on this responsibility as it is an unpaid position, however, Maria fearlessly takes care of her neighborhood and is constantly striving to improve it. Both of these speakers were incredibly inspiring and showed us how to overcome even the most difficult obstacles.

We ended the day with dinner, which was spaghetti!!!! Holla!! It was nice to have a little taste of home. Now, we're all chatting, trying not to get eaten alive by bugs, and enjoying the weather that has cooled off somewhat. Check back here tomorrow night for more news!

Sincerely,
Audra & Megan

PS: Happy Mother's day to all the moms out there tomorrow!

We Exist!

MAY 11, 2015 BY [VOLSTU22 \(EDIT\)](#)

Happy Mother's Day!!!!!!! Thank you mothers for all that you do for us and for supporting us while we are on this trip.

Today, we traveled to the La Curva community in Masatepe to learn about ArtePintura

and the life of a free trade zone worker. On the hour long bus ride, we were able to see what the rural communities outside of Managua looked like. Unlike the city, there is a lot of vegetation, less compacted housing communities, and roadside shops commonly selling homemade furniture, plants, and fresh produce. When we arrived at La Curva, we met with Jairo, the founder of ArtePintura, and went on a walking tour in the community. Jairo took us to the shutdown train station, which the government had promised to renovate into a community center. The train station was shut down five years ago and since then there has been no plan of action put in place to being a new community center.

Next we went to a tiny one room building, which serves as the town's preschool and the location of ArtePintura. Jairo explained to us that the pre-school has 24 students and one teacher who receives no compensation for her work, due to lack of government funding. Along with the preschool, Jairo's organization, which was established 17 years ago, receives no funding from the government and functions solely on donations from the community. ArtePintura has five locations in the surrounding towns and works with an estimated 213 children 5 days a week. The goal of the program is to educate children in music and art so they can become better adult and citizens, more caring, responsible parents, develop a genuine appreciation for the Gospel of Christ, and spread the message of love. Jairo emphasized the importance of making ArtePintura a program that provides equal access to both boys and girls. He hopes this program makes it so girls can have the same opportunities, as boys, and go through transformations in their communities, which will help end the cycle of sexism. A few children from the program then gave us a short concert where they played and sang a few songs for us. It is obvious that this program has had a huge impact on the community. Without it, most of the children would have no access to extra-curricular activities and no where to go while their parents are working late at the free trade zone factories. Maria Teresa, child who attends the music classes, highlighted the importance of the program: "Many other societies think we are worthless because we live in shantytowns, but I say that we exist, we have talent and we are worth a lot. This is what I have learned from this program."

After this meeting, we walked around the rest of the community and had lunch at a local restaurant where we got to drink refrigerated drinks for the first time on this trip (PRAISE THE LORD). We were served plates of mashed potatoes, beans, rice. chicken and fried

plantains chips. I must admit that I am surprised that I have not gotten tired of beans and rice yet, since we have had them as a part of every meal. After lunch we headed back to the school to meet with Dona Maria, a worker at the Gray's Fashion fair trade center. Dona Maria has worked in the free trade zone for the past 6.5 years and has been the sole provider for all of her six children, She described to us the unethical treatment that the workers face daily at the plant. There are very few laws that protect the rights of free trade factory workers. Dona Maria explained that even though the company is legally suppose to give them a half hour break, when there is a lot of work, they might only be given 10 minutes or no break at all. When the workers are filling large orders, they will usually work from about 5:45 am to 7pm with no breaks for water or to use the bathroom. At the moment, the factory is filling an order for two hundred thousand shirts. Dona Maria explained that large orders like this one must be finished in 22 days or the managers get angry at the employees. The pressure to finish the orders quickly tends to result in the managers not giving breaks and injuries (needles getting stuck in fingers or cuts from fabric cutting blades) to the employees. Another way that the companies mistreat their workers is by severely underpaying them. Dona Maria makes about 136 Cordrabas (five US dollars) a day which doesn't even come close to the amount of money needed to support a family of seven. We also learned that a significant amount of money that Dona Maria makes goes towards covering lung medication which she needs because the fuzz produced in the factory causes pulmonary issues. She expressed that she feels like she "has to keep working to cure [herself] of the disease [her] work caused." When some workers stand up to ask for their rights, there are often fired. If the company knew that Dona Maria was talking to us, she would be fired immediately. Is it just me or do these free trade factory's sound like sweat shops? However not all companies are unethical. Some allow for their workers to have Unions and provide better working environment as well as benefits for their workers. In the end, Dona Maria only want us to learn more about the conditions that these workers who make our clothes are going through.

We ended our visit by going back to Jairo's house to look at some of the artworks of the students and support them by purchasing these CDs and post cards. We then headed to out Mural Tour Batahola Cultural Center visit and learn more about the murals in this center that depicted history events of Nicaragua. After a long, full day of activities and

learning, we finally had dinner: bean and rice, potato, delicious pineapple and guess what? POPCORN! Now everyone is getting ready for our homestay tomorrow.

Love Nicolina and Thao

P.S. Because of homestay, we will not be blogging for the next couple days.

P.S.S. Someone please send Audra a pair of kicks. She desperately needs them. Also the group would love if Chelsea's mom could send us some homemade jam

Back from the Home Stays!

MAY 17, 2015 BY [DAVID \(EDIT\)](#)

Hello all! We're back from our home stays! Its me Chelsea and my blogging buddy Nathan! We'll tell you all about what we did these past 4 days.

Monday we headed up to El Regadio, our home stay community. We also stopped in Esteli to eat lunch at a nonprofit restaurant that ran numerous side nonprofit organizations. We had the opportunity to talk to the owner of the restaurant and talk about her business. We headed across the street to the hostel run by the cafe to talk to 2 peace promoters. This man and women were part of opposing sides during the Contra war, but they came together to help dissolve the violence and promote peace amongst the region. They talked about the difficulties they had trusting each other, but eventually came together to create a change. It was a powerful talk hearing their two sides of the story. From there we headed up to El Regadio to meet our home stay families.

Tuesday consisted of a lovely hike up to the local cemetery, creepy sounding i know, but trust us it was a beautiful view. We hung out there for a while, got a nice breeze and a lovely sunburn. followed by attempt 1 of trying to go to the health center. After our lovely stroll back down the hill we all went back to our home stay families for lunch. This was followed by attempt 2 of trying to go to the health center. Because we couldn't get into the health center, we went back to the community center and got a great talk on the

history of El Regadio. WE learned about the running water project, the women's association, and the impact of the United States with support of the war in the area.

Wednesday consisted of attempt 3 of trying to go to the health center. Once again we failed. To make up for that, we went to the school to learn about the school as well as play around with the local school kids. After our time at the school we had attempt 4 of the health center. Because we couldn't get into the health center, we went to a local woman who made a business out of baking cookies with the new environmentally friendly ovens the woman's group supplied. Followed by another lunch at our home stay families. After lunch and a little bit of free time we went down to a local home that welcomed us in and allowed us to make cookies! After a long baking session we went home and had our final dinner at our home stay house.

Today we left El Regadio, said goodbye to our home stay families, and took the long trip back to Managua. We prepped for our trip to the Embassy tomorrow, and had an interesting and informative talk with a local economist and biologist.

For some of us, these past few days were difficult, being sick, and adjusting to the home stays, but overall its an experience I believe we all learned and grew from.

Thank you fro reading, tomorrow we will be blogging from our new site in Matagalpa!

Greetings from Matagalpa!

MAY 17, 2015 BY [DAVID \(EDIT\)](#)

We have all arrived safely in Matagalpa with only a few bumps in the road. Some of our group began feeling ill, but we seem to be on the mend and look forward to our time with Seeds of Learning.

In our final day with Witness for Peace, we went to the US embassy in Managua and had the opportunity to hear a presentation about the work that the embassy does in Nicaragua and their interactions with the Nicaraguan government. We came with questions prepared, ranging from topics about the upcoming canal build, free trade

zones, positions on upcoming US elections, as well as how Nicaraguans may acquire immigrant and non-immigrant visas. We felt as though our questions weren't answered clearly, and were often skirted around to prevent revealing too much of embassy policy and beliefs. The presentation consisted of what the embassy does, its goals, economic cooperation, citizen security cooperation, economic and commercial section, public diplomacy, and US agency for international development. The speaker also touched on the history of the US in Nicaragua, and she expressed that the US is attempting to make up for their past mistakes and reinvent the US image.

It was very interesting to go from hearing stories of Nicaraguan people emphasizing its not us their mad at, its the US government, to hearing the embassy speak about how much the US government does for Nicaragua. Many of us felt as if we walked out of the talk with unanswered questions, but also a better understanding of the relationship between the two governments.

After we returned to the hostel, we had the time to think about how we can use what we have learned over the past week and a half, and implement those things into our daily lives. Specifically, what we can do on our own campus, for instance how we can express the themes and messages of the stories we heard of the Nicaraguan people to other UP students. Some of the ideas we came up as a group included trying to get more fair trade items in the UP bookstore, buying fair trade coffee, trying to get the commons to buy bananas from local organic companies, and selling art from the Arte y Pintura group that we met with. After coming up with these potential ideas, we decided it would be easier to split our goals into monthly and yearly processes, to help organize our goals and helpfully have more success in achieving them. Next, we had a closing ceremony that consisted of each of us talking about what we had taken away from the trip and what would stick with us after we left.

We then said goodbye to Managua and headed to Matagalpa. The two and a half hour car ride turned into four and half hours, but we made it! We are now enjoying cooler weather and rooftop hammocks. We are excited to spend the remainder of our trip working with Seeds of Learning!

– Megan & Audra

Day 1 in Matagalpa

MAY 17, 2015 BY [DAVID \(EDIT\)](#)

Hello all!

We spent our first full day in Matagalpa with Seeds of Learning relaxing, eating delicious food, and exploring a new town and culture!

This morning we had omelettes, fresh homemade bread and fresh fruit. Then we had a chance to go out and explore the town. Matagalpa is a beautiful town. There are lots of street vendors and small shops selling miscellaneous items like clothing, shoes, food, and household items. The streets are pretty hilly, so we all got our workout for the day! The climate is much cooler than Managua, and we are all enjoying the sunny weather and the strong breeze. After we finished exploring the town, we headed off to lunch at a cafe where we enjoyed club sandwiches and jamaica (hibiscus tea).

After lunch a group of us went to a black pottery workshop with two sisters. Black pottery is a dying art because the process takes so long to do. First, 5 meter holes are dug to extract the clay. Then the clay is mixed with other materials. The pottery is so dark because of the temperature it is cooked at. We each were given a piece of clay so we could make our own piece of black pottery. I made a turtle and a spoon! We get to pick up our pieces in a week after they are fired.

We spent the rest of the day talking, bonding, and eating a delicious dinner (steak!). Because many people aren't feeling 100% healthy, Seeds of Learning is giving us lots of time to recover and gather our strength for our first workday (we start Monday!).

Hopefully the beautiful weather continues. Stay tuned for more adventures!

-Jaclyn

P.S. Lots of love to all of my family reading this blog! (Mom, Dad and Kristina especially)

Road to Recovery

MAY 18, 2015 BY [DAVID](#) ([EDIT](#))

Today we had time to rest and recover since most of us were under the weather. We started off the day with breakfast and homemade bread. Mina, the director of Seeds of Learning came to orient us to the program's history and values. She also shared her story and her inspiration behind following her heart to start a non-profit, pick up everything and move to Central America to start a new life and raise her two girls (who are adorable) in a different culture and environment.

Then we had pasta at the Italian restaurant next door. Shortly after that we had a workshop at the hostel with a small cooperative of women who make jewelry out of seeds. We got to see all the examples they brought and we each had a chance to make our own bracelets or necklaces out of the seeds. Their work is beautiful and they work with young boys in the community to create the jewelry. The kids bring them back the seeds from the community and in return they help purchase their school and art supplies so they can continue studying and pursuing their artistic talents.

After that a bunch of us headed up to the rooftop to stretch and do some yoga with Aurora. Lots of time was spent laughing and sharing stories. Dinner was at the hostel and we're taking it easy to get ready for tomorrow, our first workday! We'll be headed up to a community in the mountains about an hour away to help build a school. We will be mixing cement, carrying bricks, and interspersing our time by hanging out with kids at the school and doing crafts.

Until soon!

Aurora & Thao

Work Site Day 1

MAY 20, 2015 BY [DAVID \(EDIT\)](#)

Today we began our day at 6:30 am. Our first workday! we all met up for breakfast, applied some extra sunscreen, and headed downstairs to wait for Mina, Chamba, and Jorge, our Seeds of Learning group leaders. While waiting we found a tv channel that played Spanish music videos and watched those for a bit. The plan was to be at the worksite by 8:30, but when you're on Nica time, you have to be flexible. We had to stop for gas, water, and ice, as well as carry all of our supplies to the truck, so that prolonged the journey.

The ride there was absolutely beautiful. The roads were winding and as we climbed higher and higher into the mountains, the temperatures dropped and the scenery changed into luscious green rainforest with sloping hills with flowers and crops planted on the sides of the hills. About twenty minutes or so of driving on the smooth paved roads, we veered off to a side road and the rest of the ride was very bumpy! All downhill, we were winding our way deeper into the forest, bouncing up and down. It felt like we were in that Indiana Jones ride at Disneyland.

We eventually stopped about forty minutes later at the community where we would be building. The school there is small and we were there to work alongside community members to help build extra rooms that would act as more classrooms and learning spaces. We split up into groups and focused on different tasks.

I began learning how to lay the bricks. First, we mixed the cement, added water, sloshed it around with shovels, and poured it into buckets. We transported them and climbed up the scaffolding to smear the cement down, making sure all the bricks we laid we level and spaced evenly. I worked with a community member named Cruz. He was very knowledgeable and I got the chance to talk to him about his interests and hobbies (practicing my Spanish while he practiced his English). He's also a firefighter, semi-professional baseball player, coaches little kids baseball, and does this community building work on the side. In university, he studied agricultural engineering for a couple of years and has trained under the engineers and construction workers here. I told him that if I had the chance to go back to school, I'd probably want to study that too. It was so cool to learn about all of his hobbies and the things he's involved with.

After laying bricks for a while I switched roles with others in the group to help pass the bricks. I struck up a conversation with Rito, another one of the workers there. I asked him how long he had been involved in the project and what had motivated him to join Seeds of Learning to help out with this. He explained that he had three young kids in the school there and really wanted to be part of their education and contribute to the development of the community. It has been so incredible to see the passion, dedication,, and hard work of these community members and leaders. It reminds me of all the opportunities we have in the states to step up and make a difference through participation, action, and advocacy, rather than just rhetoric, which is much easier to resort to. It also reminds me of Yamileth's quote from a couple weeks ago, and how she told us that we don't have to have money to make a difference, but that all we need to do is share what we have to offer: our time.

After brick passing I headed over to the wire cutting station where I learned how to twist the wire and bend it with tools to form the rebar. We had a quick lunch with some sandwiches: tomatoes, avocado, cheese, ham, and yuca chips. From there, we decided as a group to pack up early since some of us were feeling tired, especially after recovering from being under the weather. The rest of the day was spent napping in the hammocks and sharing stories and conversations. We had pasta for dinner, then hung out a little more, and went to bed. Bed time here is around 9:45! We all get so tired much earlier than we do in the states.

Off to bed, talk soon!

Aurora

Work Day 2

MAY 20, 2015 BY [DAVID \(EDIT\)](#)

Work Day 2

We started off the day at 6:30am to eat breakfast which was french toast. We were able to put different kinds of jams on it to make it taste really good. After breakfast the Seeds of Learning group came to pick us up on trucks and we were off the the worksite. It was a beautiful drive once we were out of Matagalpa. At the worksite we split up into three groups that were assigned the tasks of arts and craft with the children, finishing the wall of the school, and starting to build the walls for the kitchen. The first group of kids at the school was 4th to 5th grade and we created little boxes with popsicle sticks that the students could decorate. Afterwards we played games with the kids like Down by the Banks and "WA". At 10:30 the group had finished the brick wall of the school and we all switched tasks. Some of us were to make flowers out of coloring paper with the kids that were in 1st to 3rd grade and the other group was to help to build the wall of the kitchen. Putting bricks on cement was no easy task but most of our group was able to get the hang of it and become both better and faster at building.

At 12:00 we had lunch which was peanut butter and jelly sandwiches which the whole group absolutely loved. After lunch we headed back to our hostel for about thirty minutes to freshen up before going to chocolate castle. The chocolate castle was not too far away from our hostel and it was a magnificent place. The tour guide showed us around the castle which included the different processes of making chocolate from the cocoa beans. At the end of the tour, our entire group bought chocolates for their friends and families. There were different types of chocolates but I think that the chocolate with coffee beans inside it was the best.

After the chocolate castle our group headed back to the hostel and chilled out until dinner. Dinner was really good and we had to request for more servings because everyone was healthy and back to eating a lot. After dinner we had a short reflection on highs and lows of the day. Fortunately for our group many people did not have any lows. After dinner it was only 7:30 and our group was tired and we headed to bed. Today was probably one of the best days we have had during the trip so far!

see you guys tomorrow!

Nathan Nusaputra

Work Day 3

MAY 21, 2015 BY [DAVID \(EDIT\)](#)

work day 3

This morning for breakfast we had some delicious omelets with delicious mozzarella cheese and ham in them. Around 7:30 AM we headed out for our last third on the worksite. When we arrived at the worksite we split up into two groups. One group started off working at the worksite and the other started off the morning by (attempting) to make some tortillas. We went to Dona Sandra's house, a neighboring house right around the corner from the worksite. We learned the entire process of making tortillas, from the picking of the individual kernels from the whole corn, to then a boiling of them, then the grinding of the tortilla maza, to lastly, the actual molding of the maza into the tortillas. While part of the group members were making the tortillas, the others worked hard away at laying down more bricks and building up the walls of the school, library and kitchen. Also, some other group members were able to do some crafts with the kids. Lots of creative dragonflies and flowers were made with popsicle by the students.

During lunch we had some more PB & J's! Once again we were all very excited to eat some food that reminds us of home. After recharging our bodies with food we went on a tour of the community. We hiked up a large and steep hill, but in the end it was worth it because as we reached the top there was some breathtaking scenery. Afterwards we headed back down, boarded the truck and went on our way back to the hostel.

Upon our return to the hostel, we spent another relaxing afternoon on the hammocks, taking naps, reading and eating our chocolate. Overall, it was a productive and fun day at the worksite, community and in Matagalpa!

Work Day 4 and 5

MAY 23, 2015 BY [DAVID \(EDIT\)](#)

Work Day 4 and 5

We started off the day once again at 6:30 am. We had breakfast and headed back to the work site for our second to last day. Our group continued to work on the wall of bricks for both the preschool and the kitchen. We have all had the chance to place bricks and cement on the walls and we were getting pretty good at it. Our group was able to finish a whole row of bricks in 15 minutes instead of 30 minutes which is what we started at. At the work site we had BBQ chorizo for lunch. It was really tasty and delicious. After lunch we went back to work on the bricks because we were determined to finish the walls of the kitchen. Once we accomplished this task, we packed up and headed to a coffee shop in Matagalpa where everyone ordered all kinds of flavors of frappucinos. These frappucinos were better than that of Starbucks. We got flavors like peanut butter, chocolate, cookie, and caramel. After that we headed back to the hostel after a long day of work. We had pasta for dinner which was so good and gave us some energy back. We had a small discussion about the question "What did you see on the way to the worksite that was different that you would see when you normally walk to school." There was a lot of good answers like a beautiful scenery, cows, aluminum houses, fruit trees, etc. After this it was around 9 pm and everyone was out of energy and tired so we all went to sleep.

The last day of work was filled with both sadness and happiness. We were sad to leave the community members and the little kids because they were so full of happiness and willing to help out in any way possible. It was happy because it was rewarding to see the walls of the preschool, kitchen, and library built by our amazing and talented group of students. After working in the morning we had a good bye cultural exchange activity where some girls from the school performed a traditional Nicaraguan dance with beautiful dresses. Our group performed the hokey pokey and the chicken dance with all the kids and the community members loved it. At the end of the ceremony, the Nicaraguan students sang the Nicaraguan national anthem. We said our good byes to the community members and the preschool children and left the village. We headed back to the coffee place that we went to yesterday because it was a good way to relax. After the coffee we went back to the hostel and rested until dinner. For dinner, we had lemon chicken with potatoes which was really tasty. After this long day, our group was

tired and we headed to bed. It had been a great week working at the community and meeting new people. Although many of us could not speak Spanish, we were still able to have a good time and somewhat communicate with the Nicaraguan people.

Nathan Nusaputra

Saturday May 23rd

MAY 26, 2015 BY [DAVID \(EDIT\)](#)

Saturday May 23rd

Hello all! Its Chelsea, your social media correspondent! Glad to be back on the blog to let you all know whats going on.

Today we got to sleep in, because breakfast started at 8:00 rather than 6:45. unfortunately though, our bodies were so use to waking up early, that we were all up, awake, and moving around before 7:00.

The first thing we did this morning was take a short trip to a local waterfall. We rode in the back of our usual open bed truck, and got to see the amazing mountain views as we drove up. Once we reached the waterfall, it was a short trip down to the base. Oh man was it an amazing sight. We were able to walk around the waterfall and stand behind it, but we were told that we came at the proper time due to the fact that during the rainy season, the waterfall would be so powerful that there is no way you could ever get as close as we were. After hanging out and taking in the beauty as we relaxed on the shore, we headed back to grab some yummy lunch.

After lunch we were given some free time, so we were able to relax, walk around the city, and take in the sights as well as buy some lovely artisan gifts for our friends and family.

After relaxing, and having an amazing dinner we did a reflection with the group and the Seeds of Learning leaders. We reflected on the week and experiences we had together, because our time with the group is coming to an end. This reflection was probably one of the best ones we had. I know there were a lot of amazing experiences and relationships that were formed and created over these past few weeks, so to be able to try and articulate them was a bit of a challenge for most of us. I for example created a connection with Don Erick, a community leader that really spoke to my heart and my passions, even if we weren't able to communicate much due to my lack of Spanish.

Our experiences of these past few weeks have been very powerful, very moving, and very life changing. We've all seen, felt, and heard things that will impact us for a lifetime.

As the immersion comes to a close soon, over the next few days, I want to thank you all for supporting us as we support others. Thank you for believing in us as we go about our lives in a new country, and make bonds and memories that will last a life time. I hope this blog has, and will continue to make an impact on you all just as this immersion has done for us.

Have a great weekend, we will be home soon, but until then we will keep updating, and will continue to show you our experiences over the next few days.

Last Day in Nicaragua!

MAY 26, 2015 BY [DAVID \(EDIT\)](#)

We started off the morning by heading to Dario to visit the Seeds of Learning Resource Center. We met Pat, one of the co-founders of Seeds of Learning. He talked to us about how SOL started out as a program that made furniture for schools and then grew into a small after school program in the front room of a house. Now they have expanded to include music programs, a library, computer lab, and classes such as crocheting for parents. They support several hundred kids per day. It was awesome to hear Pat and the other employees of SOL talk about their work, because it was truly a testimony that

you can create opportunities for communities with very little resources if you put your whole heart into the project.

After we finished our meeting we headed off to Granada. Granada is a colonial city built by Spanish conquerors and has a lot of historical significance to Nicaragua. We toured the city in horse drawn carriages, had lunch at a local restaurant, and toured the center of town before dinner. After eating quesadillas, we had gelato and headed back to the hotel to prepare for our 3:30 AM wake up call!

This morning we woke up super early and headed to the airport! It was sad to say goodbye to our SOL coordinators Mina, Chamba and Jorge because they had been so supportive and insightful in facilitating the second half of our adventure! Currently we are in the Houston airport waiting for our connecting flights and posting the blog posts



using free WIFI

Everyone is very excited to see their friends and families!

Thank you to everyone who has supported us and thanks for following our journey through these posts!

-Jaclyn and Aurora