

Greetings dear family & friends!

Well the time has come again where I'm packing up my room here in Bluefields to return home. The Nicaraguans struggle as to why their government will only allow me to stay in their country for only 6 months, but that's the situation now. My time from now on will be both 6 months in Bluefields & equally at home.

It has been a strange 6 months with the economic situation getting worse through new government rules, but thankfully the children are still being educated - and that's my prime reason for being here. More of our families have left Nicaragua to seek work & a better life in other countries, things have become so dire.

The children who we sponsor are getting ready for the most important occasion in Nicaragua – Independence Day. Each school will march with pride around the town in their fresh uniforms and new shiny shoes. A number of our students will be wearing a sash which has printed on 'Student of Excellence' – a great achievement when we think that if these children didn't have a scholarship, they might not have been so fortunate to receive such an excellent education.

This occasion is where I would usually take lots of photos as the children march by to send to their sponsor. That can no longer happen as I will be home before this takes place on the 14<sup>th</sup> September.

Aside from my work, I use my personal time with the projects I undertake using the donations I receive.

Since I last wrote, the two main objectives have been in making a huge difference in the life of two families living conditions. It's heartbreaking to have not realised how these people have been living, because they are so humble, or ashamed to let people know. They never complain and never come begging.

The first family consists of mum Rosa and her 3 girls, all in education. Last October when Bluefields was hit by a hurricane, their small wooden home was demolished. They lost everything. I heard of this quite quickly and even though I was home at the time, I was able to send donations to have their house rebuilt on the posts that were still in the ground. When I returned to Bluefields in March I visited the new home to take photos to send to the donors. It was then that I saw how they were living, which hit me to the core! In this one roomed house was one single bed, a very small table and one borrowed chair. Two of the girls slept in the bed and Rosa and her youngest, 5 years old daughter, slept on the floor on a blanket. They cook outside in the yard and their 'bathroom' is out there too. I couldn't see any signs of electricity.



One of the girls sponsors, after seeing the photos asked if she could pay for an extension onto the house.

That has now happened and they are blessed with a ten foot extension, giving them a proper bedroom for the first time in their lives.

A bunk bed has also been paid for and another donor provided the paint. But then I realised they still had virtually nothing inside, so when another donor told me she was sending money for me to use as I felt best to make a difference in someone's life, I suggested some chairs for this family. I took one of the girls shopping with me and she chose 4 pretty plastic chairs. I still had money left over, so I asked her if should like anything else for the house – and she asked for 4 soup bowls! Still more money left from this donation so we were able to buy more items to help this lovely family out who lost everything in the hurricane and who are slowly trying to rebuild their lives again.

The second family is mum Lilian with her daughters, son and grandchildren all living in a fairly large house but in such a bad condition.



The roof leaked so bad their clothes had to be kept in polythene bags and the concrete floor was so badly broken that when the heavy rains come for 6 months of the year, the land gets so flooded that the water comes up through the floor. They don't have proper bathroom facilities either. After realising how shocking their living conditions were, my funding pot was in a state that I could offer to help with some repairs, though I really felt the house needed to be rebuilt. Lilian said she would be overjoyed if I could buy the 20 sheets of corrugated iron to make a new roof or the concrete for a new floor. Another donation came and I was able to help with both. Lilian just cried and said she felt like what she imagines children must feel when they are opening their gifts at Christmas. Nobody has ever shown her such kindness

and she thanks the people in England who have given her something she could have only dreamed about.

While I was home last time, I was given a donation specifically for the new Bluefields diabetic clinic. I have now handed over this money and it is going to help them to buy the next lot of medication.

The Saturday adult lunch club still thrives and I had some aprons made for the volunteers. The material is what is used to make umbrellas, so very durable for working in a kitchen.



And so to finish I want to share two more short happenings.

For years I've always avoided people offering me mundongo – cow soup. But on this occasion that I was invited to a home for a soup lunch, I never dreamed it would be mundongo, it's like the cheapest of cheap meals. I try to keep to the saying, 'when in Rome, do as the Romans', but cow soup was the exception. But this huge bowl was put in front of me and I didn't want to make a fuss, so I told myself it might be tastier than I imagined .....well it wasn't. ( just for your information, cow soup is made from the innards of the cow) Fortunately there was an empty bowl near me that I could keep putting in the lumps of fat and bone which helped reduce the amount in the bowl. I got over it, but my stomach didn't so easily.



The other is the problem I am having with one of my knees. I've been to the hospital for an X-ray and it has shown up that the gel in between two of the bones in my knee, has gone, so the bones are grating together. I was given medication, but Nicaraguans are very much into natural remedies. I was advised to buy chickens feet because they contain much gelatine which help put the liquid back into the knee. So I bought one pound of feet. They got cleaned well and the nails cut off and boiled with onion and peppers. You're supposed to drink the liquid and chew on the feet. Well, I met this suggestion half way, I drank but didn't chew. Another not to be repeated!

So I say goodbye and I look forward to catching up with many of you while I'm back home.

Every blessing,

love *Margaret.*