



Hurricane Mitch hit Nicaragua in late October bringing seven consecutive days of rain, as most of you already know. This issue covers this tragedy and what effect the hurricane is having and will have on this country, particularly in the lives of people with whom the CDCA works, and how we are responding.

During those days, Mitch dumped 10 *feet* of water! Rivers flooded and rushed over farmlands, houses, and people. Volcanic craters filled with water and broke free, sending huge mudslides down on whole communities.



In the US, flooding of this magnitude would have been awful and destructive, but here amidst the poverty it was devastating. There was no planned evacuation, no help. Little poor shacks could not hold fast under the water, so homes all over the country collapsed. Poorly built bridges were washed away. Poorly kept roads were destroyed, limiting even more people's chances of fleeing the rushing waters and sliding mud.

We remember when Hurricane Hugo hit the South Carolina coast. Evacuations were planned and people lost lots of property. We remember seeing on TV people in church and school shelters waiting out the storm. Here people either fled on foot or waited out the storm or their death in a shack – so different and so terrifying.

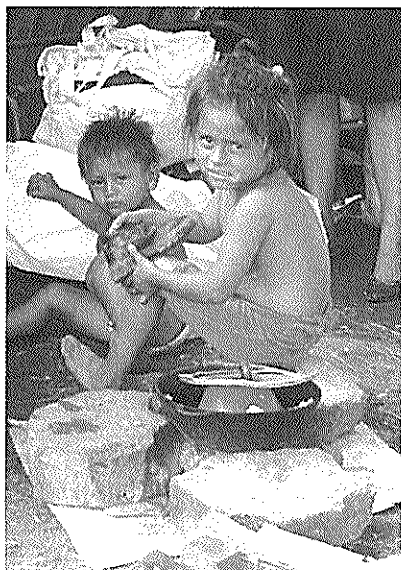
Estimates are that 11,106 people died across Central America, 15,300 people are missing, and homes were destroyed leaving 2.37 million people homeless. The vast majority of these people are in Honduras and Nicaragua.

We've heard horrific stories of people during the hurricane. [Side note: I realize I keep using the word "horror" over and over, but there is no other word for this – Stephen King has *nothing* on this!]

Mothers and fathers grabbing children too young to run and then running for their lives, trying to stay in front of the mud, only to realize that the children who could run couldn't run fast enough and were buried alive. I can't imagine grabbing Joseph to lose Daniel and Coury! Or a mother clinging to her child as she hung on to a tree to have the child pulled from her arms in the rushing waters. My God!

Or Magdalena, one of our co-workers, who has a brother who survived a mudslide. He and his wife sent their children off to safety. They stayed with their little home. Then they heard helicopters and they thought they were going to be rescued – only for the noise to be the rushing mud instead. He and his wife held on for dear life and *survived!!* Only to discover their four children had all drowned. *All* of their children!! Look at yours and try to imagine – it's unimaginable.

The area of Posoltega, (where 4,500 people lived) was wiped off the face of a mountain in a massive mudslide.



Edgar, one of our sesame growers, lost six members of his immediate family including two brothers. I cannot imagine the grief of losing, in one fell swoop, Bob and Roderick, my brothers, *plus* four others. Also Edgar, along with most growers, lost all his crops.

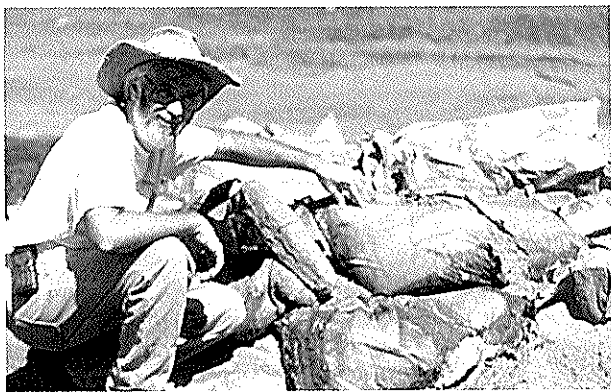
The storm is over and the water is slowly receding. So what now?

The aftermath of Mitch is as horrifying as the storm itself. Comedian George Carlin once said, "After every horror, we're told, 'Now the healing can begin.' No. There is no healing. Just a short pause before the next horror."

Carlin's cynicism is sobering and so true here. There is no healing for these people, only more life-threatening danger, pain, trials, and tests of survival of the strongest.

It has been estimated by U.S. media personnel familiar with the aftermath of various disasters, that *four times* as many people will now die from disease and hunger as a direct result of Mitch. Mosquitoes are prolific and those little, bitty, flying creatures carry malaria and dengue. There is





little clean water so cholera is on the rise. The health experts are expecting these three diseases alone to grow to epidemic proportions. With bad water, fungal infections are growing; and with all the corpses, other infections are spreading.

Volunteer workers who are looking for corpses now just burn them as they find them. César, our co-worker, went to see about our already processed sesame, only to find three corpses tangled in a fence in a field as he scooted around the broken road. These corpses would have to be burned where they lay. There is no identification. So as people wonder about their families, they have to just wonder until the family member shows up or doesn't. In one huge mudslide the church will probably just bless the valley as a huge burial ground.

Many cemeteries were flooded and all the bodies washed away. Crops were also washed away. This is at the end of the rainy season. At the first part of this rainy season we had a drought and lost the first crops, and now this . . . People are facing massive hunger. Prices for existing food have sky-rocketed. Beans have gone from three córdobas a pound to six per pound. So people, who have even less now, cannot buy basic food for survival.

Those alive are grief-stricken, stunned, and desperate – and they are angry.

What little help the Nicaraguan government could provide it is not. President Alemán has proven to be as damaging as Mitch.

He has refused to declare a State of Emergency which would create conditions that would allow more aid for relief. Why? He said that the first reason was that the non-governmental organizations (NGO's) – organizations like us, the CDCA – would get rich. And reason number two was that the private banks would suffer too much because they couldn't collect on their loans to the farmers.

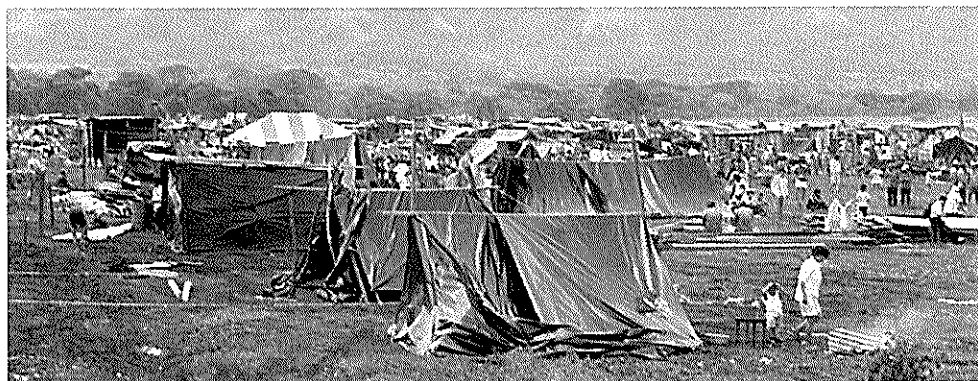
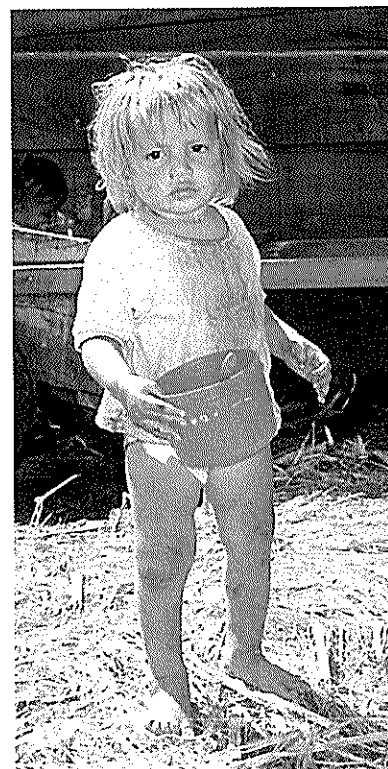
Can you believe that?!!

He even tried to get *all* aid to go through the government and the Red Cross, taxing aid coming through all other organizations, but he finally backed down on that. Now organizations like us can receive medicines, material aid, and money tax-free.

In the northeastern part of Nicaragua bordering the Río Coco, Alemán left people stranded in trees for more than a week. Some of these were people who had opposed his rampant deforestation of the rain forest. So when 1,189 people were in trees for a week, having tied their children to the trunks to prevent their falling into the rushing waters when they fell asleep, he said there were better uses of Nicaragua's five helicopters. How uncaring – no, *how cruel!*

Nicaragua has little infrastructure, thanks greatly to the tremendous interest paid on its debt to the World Bank. Nicaragua pays 2 million dollars per day in interest and that doesn't even touch the principle of 6.5 billion dollars. So there is no money for health and education. Now with the country devastated under this hurricane there is no money to rebuild. There is no FEMA (Federal Emergency Assistance) for folks. There is no insurance. There is nothing. The debt should be forgiven *with* the stipulation that all the money saved would now go into health and education and rebuilding.

The mayor of Managua at least evacuated people from the lakefront of Managua. We're glad he got people out. *But* what he has done with them is also horrific.



In return for their "dangerous" lakefront property (fairly valuable) where they farmed, fished, and had access to Managua, he has "graciously given" 1,500 families plots 10 x 15 meters in two fields he bought (cheaply) from a cooperative up the road from us. And the mayor had the audacity to name it "*Nueva Vida*" (New Life) – it's more like "*Sufrir Ahora*" (Now Suffering).

In each of these tiny lots, two and three families are now living under an improvised shelter of black plastic! That's 10 - 15 people. The city is trying to rescue housing material from the lakefront and bring the

battered, wet pieces of wood or broken pieces of zinc roofing to help rebuild.

Families, that were able to, grabbed what they could as they were evacuated. Families with a single mother grabbed only their children. One such woman is Mirna who has four children and an elderly mother. She is in the hospital delivering twins as I write this. She's alone because her husband abandoned her when she was raped by a man stealing their one cow! Her pregnancy is the result of the rape. Mirna is delivering vaginally because she started bleeding and the current "health-care" system couldn't schedule a Caesarian! Imagine if you can, living literally under a piece of black plastic, pregnant with twins, and caring for four children and an elderly mother. One kind man got them two broken pallets to get them sleeping off the ground at least. And the horror goes on and is multiplied by the thousands!

Where do we go from here? Being a small organization which primarily does development work, not relief, and trying to see where we best fit in has been difficult. What we have discovered is that the best thing about us is that we are flexible! We fit into all the cracks that are forgotten.

We have begun a replanting of beans with some of our growers. We provide the seeds and aid in preparing the ground and in return the harvested beans will be sold at *before* hurricane prices. The seeds had to get in the ground the second week of November before all water and humidity in the soil evaporated. We admire our growers who have integrity. Edgar, who lost six members of his family, refused the hope of replanting, saying that his lands dry quickly and it would be better to plant the beans where they would ripen and not dry too soon. Remember, he has lost all food *and* income for at least 10 months!





We are sponsoring medical people to come and run clinics where there are none, complete with medicines. We've given away all our stocked medicines to relief efforts.

Many, many of you have been so generous with your gifts and we are using the money on food, building supplies, chlorine for purifying water, and things other organizations can't help with.

We are, as I write, shoring up the "house" of Mirna, the woman delivering twins, so that tomorrow when she comes home with babies she has something more than black plastic. We are giving her pads for sleeping on and formula for the babies.

We give out food in the back part of the resettlement camp. Right now with the government "showing off" the camp to the press and Tipper Gore, aid is coming in there, but it is limited. The UN and the Red Cross are at the camp, but when any food or other materials come in the folks who were

settled first primarily get the aid, and frequently there is nothing left for the newer folks who are further away in the back.

We are working in tiny, forgotten communities with clothing, food, and medicines. We are, of course, working with our own growers and our already established communities. One of these communities is collecting, from their pitifully small belongings, things to share with those in the resettlement camp.

We suspect that Nicaragua is now *the* poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. It will take years for Nicaragua to get back up to the level of poverty before the hurricane. No matter how generous other Nicaraguans are, the vast majority of help *has* to come from abroad.

Many of you have responded already by contacting us by email. We have been overwhelmed by the enormity of the task at hand and equally overwhelmed by the concern and generosity of you "out there." Many have put the word out with their own email contacts, churches, or groups, raising thousands of dollars already that has now begun to reach us.

And although we can and are spending the money quickly, so much more is needed it shakes us at our foundations! The resettlement camp has currently almost 12,000 people! A city worker replied when asked how many more would be coming, "As many as God sends us." This is in Ciudad Sandino with an existing infrastructure to accommodate 30-40,000 yet with 120,000 people living here *before* the camp!

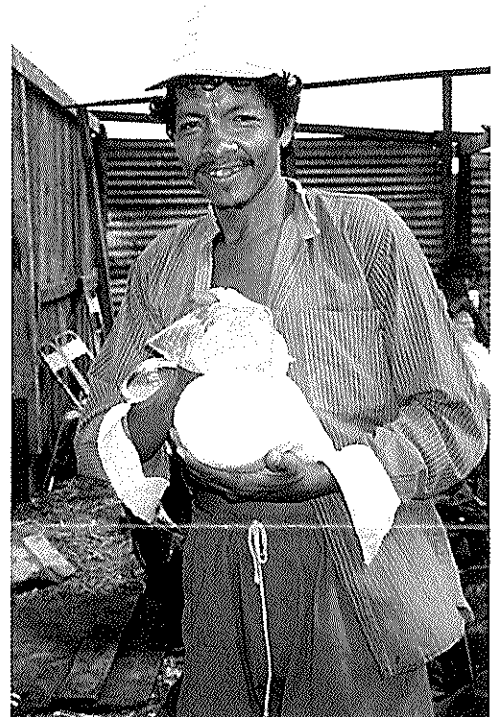
When the UN and the Red Cross pull out (the mayor's office already has), where will these people be left?

Our sesame growers and we owe \$70,000 in advance credits on crops that have drowned and rotted – let alone having nothing to feed their families. We have to help them get through so that all their advances will not be destroyed.

The little communities near all our growers are receiving no aid. The volcanoes are rumbling, spewing, smoking – threatening.

We are soliciting aid from everywhere, and people are responding. American Airlines has flown a medical friend and her load of medicine to us to do two weeks of clinics. A camera company in Charlotte, NC, has replaced our stolen camera so we can continue to record and spread the news of the struggle here. People are looking for a computer to replace our stolen one. (Yes, we were robbed. As we slept they came into the house – scary, though we are all okay.)

So many have sensed the enormity of the destruction and have responded. We hope and pray that people "out there" will not get tired and bored too quickly, because this problem is a *big one*.



As you plan your holiday giving, please consider an Alternative Gift to the poor in Central America through a contribution to the Center for Development in Central America in honor of family members or friends. We will be happy to acknowledge your gift to them with a card that is a print of a Nicaraguan painting. Please enclose a note listing each recipient's name/address, and the way you wish each card signed.

Yes! *I want to help support the work of the Center for Development in Central America.*

- Enclosed please find my tax-deductible contribution of \$_____
- See attached Alternative Gift list. (for a minimum gift of \$25.00, you may request Grits, Greens, and Gallo Pinto, our unique and versatile cookbook. For a minimum gift of \$50.00, a hand-thrown pottery mug especially designed for the CDCA; please specify right/left-handed mug handle.)
- Yes, please send me the cookbook. Yes, I would like a mug... Right-handed. Left-handed.
- I pledge \$_____ monthly, quarterly, annually, for 1999.
- Enclosed is \$25.00 for membership in the Friends of CDCA, our U.S. support group.
- Enclosed please find \$_____ specifically for disaster relief after Hurricane Mitch.



Please correct my contact information as follows: (Mail to CDCA, 2425 Spicewood Drive, Winston Salem, NC 27106-9768.

Name and Address: _____

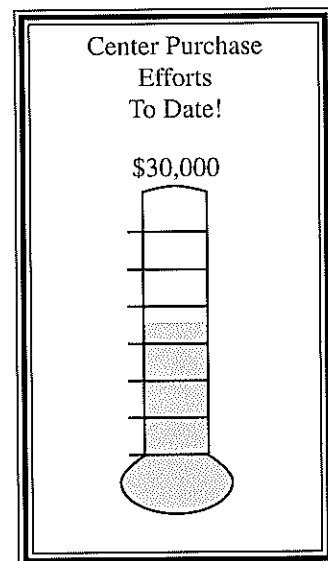
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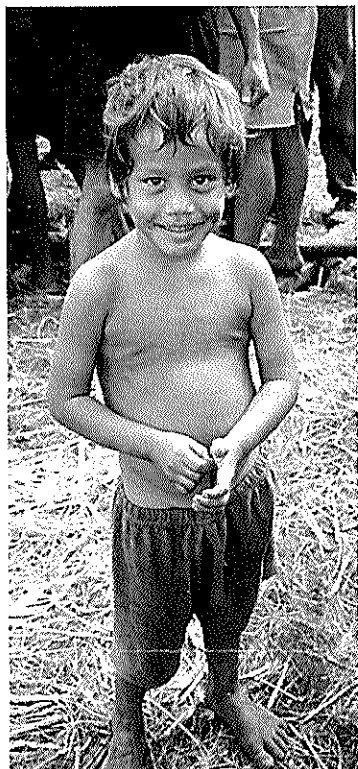
First, the Community wants to say we are keenly aware that we have a ton of reasons to be thankful this Thanksgiving and you are among them. Thank you!

Secondly, the Community wishes you the happiest of your holidays, be it Hanukkah, Ramadan, the Winter Solstice, Christmas, or Kwanzaa, and a wonderful 1999!

Thirdly, all of us who were speaking and traveling in the States thank those of you who hosted us, gave to us, listened to us, bought crafts from us, and cared for us. Thank you.



This publication is printed on recycled paper



Reflection...

I'm a Christian, and I've had some problems with all the pain created by "an Act of God." I tried to sing "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" in a church in Winston-Salem just as I finally heard from home in Nicaragua how bad it was.

"Our shelter from the stormy blast" – where was the shelter for Edgar's family?

"Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all our sons away" – rivers bore Magdalena's nieces and nephews away.

I taught my children a lesson last week that happened to be on the rainbow being God's promise. Where was the promise as that crater filled and mamas and daddies fled to have the mud carry their babies away?

People here are looking for signs of God – signs of the promise. They search for hope. They hear stories on the radio of the 10-month-old baby left on a rock as the parents slipped away; the baby rode the mudslide down on top and survived. Or, the devout Catholic family that prayed through the storm and, of the four houses there together, theirs was left standing and no one

died in all four houses. We all rejoiced in the smile of Justo (our night watchperson) when he returned from looking for his family and finding

them. People here look and look.

But for us, Christians, Jesus' story tells us to look for God in the broken and battered, not in the sky. Right now I don't know about that rainbow promise – what I do hold onto is the promise of the cross, that God is amidst the suffering and God is suffering with the people here in this broken place.

God is with Mirna as she groans to deliver her twins into desperate poverty.

God was with Magdalena's nieces and nephews as they drowned and is with her brother and sister-in-law whose souls are crushed.

God was with Edgar's family as they died in the mud and is with Edgar in his grief and despair.

I guess if that is where I believe God is, then that is where I should be too – though going "home" to the States looks more "promising." And I, for one, appreciate all of you who want in any way to help us, to help Nicaraguans, to help God ease this suffering because it breaks the heart of us all – God included.



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