One would think that after Hurricane Mitch, Nicaragua might get a break, but no-o-o-o! We have had too much rain in September and October. Lake Managua is at a record high (meaning higher than Hurricane Mitch). More flooding has caused more evacuations and more resettlement camps. The government has had to evacuate the evacuation camps! We understand that we will have an additional 500 families moved into a new camp near us.

The flooding has caused newly repaired bridges to wash away or become dangerous to cross. It has caused more crop destruction. We lost much of our mung bean crop as it molded in its pods. Mosquitoes are rampant and malaria and dengue (including hemorrhagic dengue) are reaching epidemic proportions.

Now many are saying the rainy season is over, which is not good, because crops are still being planted. Now that the flooding is over, farmers are trying to salvage what they can. They need some rain, just not so much.

We continue to work with the growers. We do have some successes. The peanuts, a new crop, seem to be doing very well (hope I just didn’t jinx them!). The honey is doing well and our buyer is putting out a new label advertising the Nicaraguan honey (with pretty Nicaraguan birds and flowers on the label). The organic business is still thousands of dollars in debt because of Hurricane Mitch and this current disaster is not making anything any easier.

Through our contact with the growers we are personally involved with the current land reform adjustments. Old owners are coming back and trying to reclaim the land they abandoned, which is now in the hands of poor farmers and has been for 15 or more years. We have had difficulty getting our mung bean crop out of the fields because one such owner called the police. Cooperatives are failing. Huge businesses, which don’t give a hoot about the poor or the land, are taking over. Nicaragua is not only becoming poorer but it is becoming environmentally disastrous.

What to do (as a good friend says)? What to do? Well, we do what we can. Trying to support the small growers. Trying to give them the technical assistance as well as the capital assistance they need to struggle, at least. Without the help of you, folks, we could do nothing. Thank you.

In Nueva Vida, the resettlement camp of 12,000 hurricane victims, much work is being accomplished despite bureaucracy. More temporary shelters are going up. The materials come from US AID through the Red Cross to us. We figure we have constructed over $170,000 worth of shelters. Unfortunately, it is one year after Mitch and temporary shelters are still going up.

Also with US AID, we are reposiitioning and digging new latrines and gray water catches in the first area of the resettlement camps. Old latrines are caving in and they are too close together for safe ground water seepage. The gray water catches collect the water from families’ concrete wash basins which prevent mosquitoes from thriving.

We have been held up in this project for 2 1/2 months while the Nicaraguan bureaucracy ground everything to a halt! Well, everything except the mosquito population and the dengue epidemic! Finally we are moving forward again now.

Working with these big organizations has been a learning experience for us. It has also been very strange because we tend to be on the outskirts of such organizations. Large organizations move slowly, but they have big bucks. We could never have gotten that much material for shelters on our budget. They, in turn, are impressed with how quickly we move once we have the materials in-hand.

Our speed isn’t all that amazing though. When you work directly with the community and organize them (which our promoters do so well), then the community is standing ready to work. These folks want a decent place to live in; give them the materials and in a whoosh it is up! Lots of incentive is there. We have large organizations asking us how they can help with their own money. All large organizations would do well to locate the small groups that work directly with folks and then channel their aid through them.

Volunteers digging latrines
The Health Center is now three months old. We are learning daily. We are open from 1:00 - 5:00 (frequently longer) and we see 25 - 30 patients. It has been wonderful to be able to do follow-up with patients, which we have never had the capacity to do before. The staff is caring, conscientious, and very tolerant in learning new ways.

We prioritize children and women, but we do see men, which many clinics do not. We do lots of emergency wound care and long-term wound care. We see an abundance of infected feet and legs.

Hopefully, in 2000, we will start health promoter training and broaden our work to a more public arena and into education. We have so many dreams. Unfortunately, as a woman working in Nicaragua put it, "health care is NOT sustainable". There is no way for health care to support itself in this environment. It is a bottomless pit, though needed. So we put money in and we see kids get well, but the next day we need more money to see some other kid get well.

Health care on limited budgets calls for hard decisions. With your $100, who gets the medicine? A baby who will never be well or antibiotics for 20 kids? Seems like an easy enough choice when you are at your home reading this letter, but looking into the face of the baby's mama, it's not easy at all.

We are organizing a committee to help make these decisions. Who gets the limited resources and who does not? The committee will help set policy for the clinic and will help aid the clinic with labor. We do use two volunteers from the community every day.

As we are writing this, we are still working on getting electricity and running water into the clinic. We still do not have a piece of land promised for a permanent clinic. Bureaucracy, once again....

Much of our efforts in microenterprise are going into Nueva Vida. There is no employment for these folks.

We have started a loceta business. These are reinforced concrete poles and slabs to build prefabricated housing. We have hired four workers and they are working here, in the back of this property. Their first order was not ready on time, thanks to all the rain. Rogelio oversees their work to make sure that the quality is excellent... no hurrying of the curing process so that the concrete is strong, which is important in earthquake territory.

We have four other businesses on the drawing boards: a women's sewing cooperative, a blockmaking business, a cleaning and processing plant for seeds and beans, and an oil press. We are researching cooperative management practices. We are exploring ways to give people work but not give them back-breaking work.

And in other areas of work.... With Profamilia we are helping women, who wish, receive surgical sterilization. We would be helping the men, too, but no takers so far!

The Women's Support Group, Las Arañas, is still going strong. They are learning skills but mostly they are supporting each other and giving themselves a break from their back-breaking work.

The Health Promoter Training in Las Parcelas and El Caimiio have gotten a new wind and are expanding into mental health. We are looking to offering these trainings in Nueva Vida soon.

The Sister Preschool/School Program is maintaining itself. We haven't added any new partners, though we are looking to expanding this project in other aspects of our work. For example... medical people teaming up with the health clinics.

The Las Parcelas school is on schedule to open for the new school year. HOORAY!

We continue to host volunteers both short-term and long-term. North Anderson Community Church (Presbyterian) is here as we get this ready for the printer.

They have 3 doctors, 2 other medical workers, and so many enthusiastic workers. They are doing medical consults and trainings, construction work, they brought down about $50,000 worth of medicines with them, and they have taken care of us!
The Friends of CDCA have taken on the building of a separate volunteer dorm as a project. With the huge increase of volunteers and delegations, we really could use a separate place to sleep volunteers. Currently we host them in our home, which is also the office and center. The Friends are asking past volunteers to give one night's cost to the constructions ($20.00). So far the response has been surprisingly low. If you would like to donate, please send your contribution earmarked “Volunteer Dorm”

Usually in our December issue we take the opportunity to tell you more about all of the staff and not just the Jubilee House Community. We have so many people working with us that it is really impossible. So who are all these people?

We have Juan Che, Francisco (Chico), Juanito, and Daniela, our community promoters in Nueva Vida. Jorge (the doctor), Maria, Henry, and Luís (the night watchperson) are working in the Health Center. There are 20 (más o menos) field workers with the mung bean crop (see article). There are four loceta builders from Nueva Vida (new microenterprise business). Saul and José drive the tractors. We have contracted with Saul, an agronomist, during Karla’s maternity leave.

Our “old and normal set” has grown as well. Shaggy (nickname from Scooby Doo) and Lupe do a great deal of the odds and ends. Cabeza still goes to school on Saturdays and is a wonderful young adult. We have a new night watch person, Don Santos (he is about 4’11”), weighs about 100 lbs. soaking wet, is in his 60’s, and is GREAT! Our field supervisor, Don Manuel, is about 70 and going strong (stronger than me!). Karla has had a baby girl. Mother and daughter fine. Magdalena is still with us and is cooking for almost all of the above mentioned folks every day. Rogelio is still being drooled over by volunteers and tries to keep everything going construction-wise. Maestro turned 60 this year. He and his son, Enrique, are always on an engine. César is still with us, straightening us out, and is up for City Council in the next election.

And us? We are looking forward to having Tiff and Jessica home for Christmas and the big New Year. Coury and Daniel have started school at the German/Nicaraguan School - first time away from home for Daniel. They are adjusting to the new schedule, Spanish, and German. Joseph, age 3, is having to adjust to Mama being away every day at the clinic.

Pat and Kathy are currently on the West Coast of the U.S. speaking. They have enjoyed seeing that part of the country for the first time and making new friends and seeing old friends. They will end their trip with a good visit with their mother who is joining them in Texas. Mike and Kathleen enjoyed seeing their families and friends during their trips. Kathleen’s brother recently had a heart attack but is doing well now. Sarah is relearning her German from college as she does bits and pieces with Coury and Daniel. She now has Spanish, Mandarin, and German all fighting for prominence in the “foreign language” part of her brain!

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 and 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 Gollo 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.) Please allow 8 weeks for delivery.

☐ Yes, please send me the cookbook. ☐ Yes, I would like a mug… ☐ Right-handed. ☐ Left-handed.

☐ I pledge $ ________________ monthly, ☐ quarterly, ☐ annually for 2000.

☐ 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 Dr, Winston Salem, NC 27106-9768.)

Name and Address:

__________________________

Phone / fax / email address:
Reflection...

In a month or less the world will be celebrating a new year, and then a new millennium, maybe a new life?

New Life...Nueva Vida in Spanish and the name of the resettlement camp down the road from us. For those of you who do not know, these people were evacuated from their homes as Lake Managua flooded during Hurricane Mitch a year ago. They were promised a lot and a house. The lot was a 10.15-meter lot, placed smack dab beside another lot, in a cow pasture. No trees or even little plants once 12,000 people trampled across what was once pasture.

Houses are slowly coming. Latrines went in and are now being repositioned. Lots were expanded a bit to give wicking room for the latrines. There is limited electricity and water now. As the houses go up, food is provided to the workers. When all the houses are built, the camp will appear to be a not-too-bad development area, but the problem is in what cannot be seen.

The school is not finished and illiteracy will abound. The health centers cannot cope with that many people. The food is running out and malnutrition is growing among the children. There is no employment. As a reporter commented, "It looks good, but there is no way to survive."

But survive they are trying. They have planted little trees and flowering plants in that hard, hard dirt. They look after each other and let others know what is going on with their neighbors. They work hard. They do complain, but they also say thank you. They worry, but they smile and laugh. The children play with trash and everyone watches out for the kids. They join together to bury their dead. And most wonderingly to me, they help us whenever they see an opportunity. For example, last night five men and one woman got mud-splattered trying to get our truck unstuck (and cleaning their few clothes is no easy matter).

The people of Nueva Vida were not given new life; they give new life. Maybe as we go into the New Year, then into the New Millennium, we can learn from these folks about looking after our neighbors, finding joy where we can, protecting all children, a sense of gratitude, planting in the dirt, working hard and celebrating life because all life is precious. If we, in the First World (or the Developed World), could learn this from our poor neighbors, then maybe the next millennium will be a kind one, a hopeful one, a green one... maybe even an end to poverty?

Happy New Year!