As the growing season ends, COPROEXNIC, the organic agriculture cooperative, is doing well… processing and shipping sesame with no quality control issues. This is mostly due to its manager, Su-Lin Meyrat.

Su-Lin is a Vietnamese Nicaraguan woman who spends much of her time at the sesame plant. COPROEXNIC is waiting on obtaining its 2017 lease from the Nicaraguan government, which owns the plant. The lease is being delayed because we hope - they are looking at the possibilities of awarding COPROEXNIC a 3-year lease instead of just one. Meanwhile, without a lease in-hand, COPROEXNIC’s line of credit has been frozen.

It is unusual in Nicaragua for a woman to be an agricultural manager unless she is manager of a women’s cooperative, and yet Su-Lin is the general manager of COPROEXNIC, Nicaragua’s largest exporter of sesame. Most of the workers at the sesame plant are women as well.

Su-Lin came to COPROEXNIC from the food safety department of the Nicaraguan government. She is an extremely hard worker and is trying to get the plant up to top-notch production. She is improving efficiency, insureing all their products meet the high standards of food safety quality. She is also working to instill a culture of not only doing a task, but also documenting the completed task in writing.

Although no cotton was planted this year, the sesame and peanuts are doing well…knock on wood! Growing organically improves not only the quality of food and the land, it also improves people’s lives: One example...

Carlos Sandoval is president of COPROEXNIC’s largest grower group. It includes 150 small farmers. He grows peanuts and sesame. In recent years, with the income resulting from his organic crops, he bought a truck and some farm equipment. Now he provides services for pay to other farmers and his income continues to grow, giving him and his family a better life.

In September, representatives from Their-Bucks Coffee, a non-profit, coffee-buying organization, came to talk face-to-face with coffee growers, including El Porvenir, the organic coffee cooperative. In addition to quality El Porvenir coffee, they agreed to buy 18,000 pounds of coffee from four other cooperatives (one has won the Cup of Excellence four times).

Together with Winds of Peace, Their-Bucks have hired a consultant who is working with El Porvenir for a year to help them improve their cooperative’s
This year we received a grant from Irish Quaker Faith in Action to support and encourage the communities’ health promoters. We currently have 30 active lay health promoters: 22 are in Nueva Vida, the barrio where our clinic is located, and eight are in three rural villages surrounding Ciudad Sandino.

With IQFA’s support, we give a token cash incentive to the promoters. We also provide large first aid kits, glucometers, blood pressure machines, thermometers, baby scales and nebulizers for the promoters to keep in their homes for use when patients come to them. Since July, these promoters have given aid to 1,263 children and 1,289 adults.

Who have they helped? One such patient was Ana and her baby. Two years ago, Ana, age 15 and pregnant, came to our New Mother’s group. Ana was extremely malnourished. She looked like she was eight years old because she was nothing but bones, and was greatly embarrassed by that. She lived with 19 other family members.

She ended up having a C-section. After returning home with her new baby, several promoters went to see her and told us that Ana wanted to die. Jessenia, our paid health promoter coordinator, went with one of the promoters to follow up with her. Jessenia saw that she was suffering from post-partum depression. She was isolating herself, not feeding her baby, and not eating, thus getting even more malnourished.

Jessenia talked her into going to see our clinic counselor, Pat, as well as Dr. Jorge. Ana attended two counseling sessions. Dr. Jorge sent her for a TB test thinking this was more than just post-partum depression and not eating. He also referred her to Dr. Gulnara, our ob/gyn, who ended up treating her for an abnormal PAP. It turned out Ana did indeed have tuberculosis.

Not long ago, Jessenia with Dr. Victoriano, our pediatrician, went to check on her and her baby. Ana is now a loving, attentive mother at the age of 17. She is putting on weight and may come to our lactation group, because she no longer feels embarrassed about being so thin.

We have learned that home visits are crucial to the well-being of many of our patients. Our patients are too poor to have home health nurses. Juan was an occasional patient at our clinic… coming in for acute problems. We diagnosed him with diabetes and hypertension but he did not take his medication.

Ten months ago, he had a stroke. He could hardly move, let alone speak or walk. Jessenia heard about his stroke and went to his home. Our clinic provided him with a wheelchair and started doing home visits to monitor his medications. The government provided him with physical therapy. He can now speak and walk with a walker also provided by our clinic.

When going to his home, Dr. Elizabeth, our GP, and Jessenia pay close attention to his blood pressure and his diabetes. Besides evaluating his health, they also

administrative capacity. El Porvenir’s coffee quality has been declining for the last two years… one reason is higher temperatures.

It is sad to see a cooperative that protects its forest and grows organically get beaten by climate change… but they are not the only ones. With climate change, 122 million more people may be driven into extreme poverty by 2030… mostly small-scale farmers.

In Nicaragua, coffee is the largest export crop, but the quality and quantity of coffee is diminishing due to the rise in temperatures. Exploring ways to plant different varieties of coffee and preparing for the future may keep this little cooperative afloat.
These **volunteer** professionals not only learn for themselves but they, too, also catch problems that would go untreated if there were no home visits. Accompanied by our nurse Martha, two volunteers from the Alaska brigade visited with Angela and her one-month-old baby, Yasser. Yasser had extreme diarrhea and was dehydrated.

They brought him back to the clinic and gave him oral rehydration fluids because they could not get a vein for an IV. They counseled Angela and referred the baby to the hospital. Angela didn’t want to take Yasser to the hospital.

There is a deep fear among many that going to the hospital is a death warrant. It is also financially difficult for the poor, because even though healthcare is free including hospital care, there is no room for family to sleep within the hospital and there are no cafeterias.

Fortunately, the family brought Yasser back into the clinic the next day and he was improving. This family, too, is grateful.

The **Alaska medical brigades** have been volunteering with the CDCA for 13+ years now. Many of their members return each year to keep their work going. Their respiratory therapist talks with families of asthmatics to offer suggestions in how to reduce triggers. Besides medications, she brought more peak flow meters and taught promoters how to use them to measure how much air patients are getting in their lungs.

Their lactation consultant, Jen, always teaches pregnant women about birth and the importance of breast feeding. Besides doing home visits, this year she went to the public clinic with Gulnara, our part-time ob/gyn who works there also. Jen observed the care there and educated those women as well.

The Alaskans brought bags with gifts for new babies to be given to new mothers. Added with the bags that volunteers **Nora and Becky** already have sewn and filled, we have enough - for a little while. Our New Mothers’ Group keeps growing and growing.

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Five or six years ago, Nora and Becky started making these bags to give to new mothers as an incentive to come to our New Mother’s program, to encourage them to bring their babies in for well-visits, and to provide for these poor women, who receive little to no presents. If you sew and want to help, contact us and we can give you specifics.
The New Mothers’ program literally saves lives. María, age 27, joined the group 11 months ago when she found out she was pregnant. She went to all the classes as well as all her prenatal appointments with Dr. Gulnara. She made sure she had all the tests and ultrasounds prescribed for her... all provided by our clinic. Seven months into her pregnancy her blood pressure shot up and she was having pain as well as bleeding.

Gulnara referred her to the local hospital who told her to go home and rest...FOUR times.

Her pain did not subside nor was her blood pressure going down. Because she had attended the classes, she knew pain and bleeding were indications of something wrong; therefore, she kept returning to Gulnara who finally got her into the women’s hospital in Managua (a public hospital for women with complications).

The baby was in stress and mom’s blood pressure was rising. They did a C-section and both María and baby are fine. María is convinced… as are we… that because she knew not to ignore her symptoms and because Gulnara advocated for her, she and her baby are alive.

Dr. Owen has been coming with the Alaska brigade since the beginning. He was excited about our new clean room at the clinic. He and Gulnara performed five biopsies and removed a not-so-tiny lump from a patient’s breast. Being able to do limited procedures not only saves our patients many months of waiting for the public health system, but also enables them to know earlier what next steps are needed to be healthy.

The clinic had a morning-long Health Fair in November to celebrate the 18th anniversary of Nueva Vida’s formation as a refugee camp for 12,000 people, after Hurricane Mitch hit Nicaragua killing over 11,000 people. During the one morning…

- Nurse Isamar took 12 PAPs.
- Hélène, our new volunteer nurse from Belgium, checked-in patients while
  - Grace, a Bucknell alumni, helped take 31 blood sugars and blood pressures.
  - Becca and Ian handed out 71 eye glasses for reading.
  - Ligia did 83 fluoride treatments.
We had an organization that specializes in HIV come provide education and test 30 people for HIV.

Health promoters and teens handed out information on mosquito-borne illnesses… like Zika… and brochures of the services offered by our clinic.

Further health outreach into the communities:
we partnered with the Ciudad Sandino Rotary Club to examine people’s eyes and give out glasses in two rural communities and a barrio in Ciudad Sandino, to which they will return because the Moravian Church which organized the event was quite efficient! They saw 150 people and gave out 109 glasses, plus we will make 50 low-cost distance glasses matching patient’s prescriptions with the equipment donated by Bucknell University (Lewisburg, PA) last May.

In our vision clinic, we always take blood pressures because it affects the measurement of the eyes. Grace found some dangerously high blood pressures and several times as the people received their glasses they were told to go to the hospital. These people were walking time bombs.

Later in November, St. John’s Methodist Church (Georgetown, TX) came to learn and work on the third clinic building. With our support groups of Las Lobas (pre-teen and teen girls), two pregnant women groups, a group of new mothers, a group of parents with asthmatic children, a group of mothers with toddlers, a boy’s group, and a LGBT group… we really need that third building…

THEREFORE on Giving Tuesday, a day set aside in the cyber world for donating to organizations, we are setting the goal of raising $18,000 for the third clinic building’s roof on that day. We can have trainings and support groups in a building without a floor or doors, if we must, but we need that roof! If Giving Tuesday has come and gone, you can still give for the roof! For more information:

http://jhc-cdca.org/givingtuesday-2016/

Also, if you want to help, sponsor a fund-raiser. Courtney, a 2015 long-term volunteer, organized a 5K run at the University of WA to raise money for the third clinic building. 54 students participated in the run.
Changes as the year ends...

Ian is leaving the volunteer coordinator’s position early to care for his mother after surgery. We thank him for his work with us and his ever-constant sweetness to our old crankiness.

We are thrilled that our son, Daniel, is joining the staff as our first-first ever volunteer supervisor. He will manage the ever-growing paperwork connected with exoneration of medicines, oversee our new volunteer coordinator, Autumn, as well as help with delegations and other work that comes up.

Just for your information:

On the 6th November, incumbent Pres. Daniel Ortega with his vice-presidential running mate, First Lady Rosario Murillo, won the election with 72.5% of the vote. This means also that 72.5% of the Assembly will be Sandinista Party candidates. 66% of registered voters turned out to vote.

JHCommunity:

Another grandchild is born! Michael Anthony (pronounced Antoni) was born on the 5th of October to our son, Coury, and our daughter-in-law, Cassie, past CDCA clinic volunteer from Alaska. Mike and Kathleen were there for his birth.

We are entering the time of year when we relish visits from grandchildren, children, and this year for Thanksgiving, Sarah’s brother, niece, nephews, and grandnieces/nephews (11 in number) will be visiting. We are excited about that.

Kathleen’s mother, Peggy who some of you will remember had strokes last year, is with the Community for three months. We are also exceedingly happy to have her well enough to travel and share these times with us.

Becca, Paul, Eibhlín and Orla, who missed Coury and Cassie’s wedding last year, are glad to be here for the church wedding of our son, Daniel, to our daughter-in-law, Claudia, in December when the family comes (legal ceremony happened last February). The girls have finished 5th and 4th grades, earned white belt levels in karate, and are bubbling over in anticipation of the wedding and the arrival of the new baby, plus playing with Charlotte and Elliot, our other grandkids.

While Mike and Kathleen were with Anthony and parents in California, Sarah was also there doing a short speaking tour. Thanks to all who helped her! While the three of us were away, Pat, Kathy and Becca held down the fort here at home.
REFLECTION:

As I write this, it has been two full days since we learned that Donald Trump will be the next president of the United States. We have already received emails from people wanting to move here. We have seen reports of cruel hate speech and violence towards people of color especially people of Arabic descent and of the Islamic faith... especially women who wear the hijab.

We have also talked with our staff about their concerns... what will the U.S. now do with regards to Nicaragua? Will the economy crash and all donations dry up? Will companies withdraw from Nicaragua ending jobs here and go back to the States? Will the Nicaraguans be able to feed and care for their families?

And then we have our own personal concerns as well: How will the work here continue? Are we entering another period in human history of hatred, bigotry, death and destruction? Will climate change escalate and destroy our environment? Will our children and grandchildren living in the States be safe? Will our friends and their children be safe?

I clench my jaw. My muscles are like knots. I try to be reassuring, but I feel like I am lying both in my blogs and with our staff. I'm so afraid.

I've been holding onto the thought of Christmas time. I love Christmas. We add lights to our home with a tree and strings of lights. We adorn the house with creches and knickknacks that have histories of love. AND most importantly for me is that our children come home with their children and their beloveds, so I hold on to that moment in time.

This year, though, I've been pondering more and more the angels’ proclamation to the poor shepherds...

Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

In the midst of racism and bigotry, I think about this baby of whom the angels sang, and who he actually was. He was Arabic and Jewish. He was born homeless, poor, in an occupied nation. He became an immigrant to Egypt when his safety was threatened.

At the beginning of his ministry he proclaimed what he was about...

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor...to proclaim the release of the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord [the year of Jubilee].

Amidst all the bad news lately, I notice all the “good news” in the two above passages. Where do I find good news? Jesus got people to share their food and then fed multitudes. He healed. He admonished the powerful religious leaders of his time for thinking they had the whole truth. He told stories to call his followers to truly care for each other and care for those who were poor and vulnerable.
He told us to love and pray for our enemies, to be generous, to not worry, to pester for justice, to heal, to call others to the way of love, and to go above the call of duty, to be kind.

He did not teach tolerance… he taught love. He wanted his followers to be known by their love, their faith, their actions.

He died by state execution… and, I believe, rose from the dead to give us hope that nothing - - not even death - - can conquer love… selfless love.

No matter who you follow or don’t follow…his teachings are good solid foundations to build a society.

And I want you to know, that when some of his “believers” spout, vote and act with hate, exclusion, racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, violence, etc. … they are not his followers, because the one thing most people agree on is that the baby, whose celebrated Christmas birthday the angels sang about, grew up to be not only a teacher of goodness, but also lived a life of love, generosity, justice, peace and kindness… and this is where I find my hope and courage.

-Kathleen

Thank You for your support.
We wish you and yours
Blessed Holy Days, fun holidays, and a New Year full of goodness...

- All of us who are part of the CDCA

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