Lasell’s group received a warm welcome at the San Juan Del Sur Biblioteca, Nicaragua’s first free public lending library. Children performed a play of the classic story *Ferdinand the Bull*, read poems, and danced in traditional costume for us.

In the short six years since it’s founding by ex-pat Jane Mirandette, the library has expanded to hold 12,000 books. In addition, it offers homework help, arts and crafts, toys, companionship, and a place to hang out. The library also runs a bookmobile that visits 30 rural villages.

Our group rode with the bookmobile on our second day in Nicaragua and visited three schools in the countryside. At each location children eagerly but politely lined up at the makeshift check-out desk to return their last picks and borrow new books chosen from the Rubbermaid bins we delivered by pick-up truck.

Kristen Augenfeld helped measure children for school uniforms. Chelsea Comeau handed out new toothbrushes to youngsters. Others chatted with teachers and children, helped make Mother’s Day cards, and Camille Gillman demonstrated martial arts moves to the amusement of shy students.

Back at the library, we helped Jane unload and organize incoming donations, and inventoried new books.

Most of all we marveled at the locals’ love for their library, and enthusiasm for getting books to anyone who wants them!

Lasell College International Service-Learning

**Students Volunteer for Literacy**

*Students Volunteer for Literacy*

A Hurricane Didn’t Dampen our Spirit!

Wednesday morning greeted us with gloomy skies and torrential downpours.

Aware that “rainy season” had just begun, we thought such weather must be typical, and only later discovered that we were experiencing Tropical Storm Alma, the first tropical storm on record to strike Pacific coast of Nicaragua!

Our hosts told us that Alma was a category 1 hurricane, and our worksite partners sent Lasell students away (surprised that we showed up at all!)

The streets looked like rivers, and we all feared for the many people living in small shacks as runoff descended upon them. Fortunately, Alma passed quickly– the next day was sunny and bright.

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**Summer 2008**

**Inside this issue:**

- Water Filters Save Lives
- The “Intercambio” Approach
- 550 Pounds of Donations
- Learning From Each Other
- What Do You Know About Nica?
- What Can You Do To Help?
- Poetry Contest Winner

**Announcements:**

- The next Nicaragua service-learning experience will be during Spring Break, 2009. Apply this fall!
- Check out our website at: http://shouldertoshoulder.lasell.edu
- Contact Lydia Pittman at LPittman@Lasell.edu with any questions about Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder
The Shoulder to Shoulder model of service-learning extends the classroom into the “real world”. Our group studied, read, and talked about Nicaragua, but in May we were educated by the people who actually live there!

On the Saturday of our stay, Lasell students visited the Free School for Adults. Supported by the Newton/San Juan Del Sur Sister City program, a primary school (which we painted as a volunteer project) opens its doors to hundreds of adults who want to receive a high school education. We helped teach English and then digressed into “intercambio,” mutually beneficial exchange or discussion about our lives, thoughts and questions.

Earlier in the week we had a private meeting with the Mayor of San Juan Del Sur. With him, and with the adult learners, we discussed foreign investment, poverty, tourism, the pros and cons of development, health concerns and more. We heard a wide variety of perspectives, showing that sometimes the more you learn, the less you know!

Shoveling and sifting gravel for hours may not sound like a great time, but knowing how important this work is really made it worthwhile!

BioSand Filters remove 95.0 to 99.0% of organic contaminants such as bacteria, viruses, and worms from water, making it safe for drinking, food preparation, and personal hygiene.

The Newton Workshop for Appropriate Technologies in San Juan Del Sur makes these filters, and other low-cost, low-tech solutions to public health problems.

On our first day in Nicaragua the Lasell crew worked on filtering the gravel that goes into cement water filters which get distributed throughout the Nicaraguan countryside.

This provides clean water that literally saves lives by preventing death from preventable illness such as diarrhea and dehydration.

The workshop’s Director Fidel Pavon was out of town, but his young sons acted as our supervisors for the morning. The Workshop was created as a project of the Newton/San Juan Del Sur Sister City Project in 1996. It also produces eco-friendly stoves, and latrines.

Water Filters Save Lives!

“Intercambio” With the People of San Juan Del Sur

Lasell Lugs 550 Pounds of Donations to Nicaragua

We received donations of public health supplies, office and school supplies, used clothing, fabric and sewing supplies, books, backpacks, and more!

Each of the 11 participants of Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder carried a suitcase full of 50 pounds of donations in addition to their own luggage. Upon our arrival in Nicaragua all of the goods were delivered to local partner organizations to be organized for distribution.

The staff of the San Juan Del Sur Library agreed to deliver school supplies as they went out on the Bookmobile routes.

We visited the local Health Center to donate health and first aid supplies. Even the suitcases themselves were donated to organizations or families in need.

It was easy to see that things we might discard or take for granted here in the U.S. are desperately needed in Nicaragua.
Learning From Each Other Through Individual Projects

Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder is a service and learning program—much more than a volunteer vacation!

There is no separate class that participants take, but each student must complete an academic component relevant to their studies.

This year Chelsea Comeau studied the education system in Nicaragua, Kristen Augenfeld explored the clothing industry and sweatshops, Georges Fadel researched foreign investment, Ivan Gonzalez studied Nicaraguan literature and poetry, Daniel Iles compiled a student guide for travel and background information, Joey Bitzer learned about indigenous populations, Jessica Vivona investigated the small group dynamics of Shoulder to Shoulder, and Camille Gillman designed our website shouldertoshoulder.lasell.edu.

Before the trip, the group had a series of “teach-ins” where each participant presented to the others on their niche topic.

From Georges’ presentation “Is Nicaragua For Sale?” to Jessica’s group ice-breaker activities, we learned from each other and sparked fascinating discussions.

Most importantly, we traveled to Nicaragua well-informed and even more curious!

What Do You Know About Nicaragua?

For 40 years Nicaragua was ruled by the Somoza dynasty. Dissatisfaction with this dictatorship reached new heights after an earthquake destroyed most of the capital city of Managua in 1972 and the Somoza regime mishandled and stole aid funds.

This led to a popular uprising by the Sandinista National Liberation Front which took power in 1979. President Ronald Reagan, opposing Nicaragua’s ties with Cuba during the cold war, authorized funding, arming, and training of anti-Sandinista “Contra” forces, composed mainly of Somoza’s former National Guard. The Reagan administration covertly funded the Contras by selling arms to Iran.

Nicaragua’s current president, Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista party, gained power in 2006, with 38% of the vote. The country still struggles daily with issues of poverty.

What Can I Do to Help?

The next Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder experience will take place during Spring Break (March) 2009. Lasell students interested in participating may apply in the fall.

Contact Lydia Pittman for more information, or visit our booth at the Student Activities Fair. See MyLasell for updates.

We partner with non-profit organizations that need support. Please visit the following websites:

Shoulder to Shoulder http://shouldertoshoulder.lasell.edu
San Juan Del Sur Biblioteca http://www.sjdsbiblioteca.com
Newton/San Juan Del Sur Sister City http://www.newtonsanjuan.org/

“I really had the experience of a lifetime in Nicaragua.”
- Kristen Augenfeld ’09
The Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder service-learning experience provides opportunities for students to volunteer for literacy, public health, and social justice, while working side by side with community members, gaining understanding through cultural exchange, and examining issues related to poverty and development. By designing academic components in conjunction with their courses, student participants connect a service trip to Nicaragua with their individual majors and unique interests.

Winning Poem, “To My Library”

San Juan Del Sur Biblioteca Publica
Annual Poetry Contest
Nov 14, 2007

TO MY LIBRARY

Six years ago you were just a cocoon
but you breathed
Whispers were heard and
Your people happily awaited you ...

Six years ago, history could have been different
But destiny wanted you to be from here
and not another city .
To be from here without regard to nationality.

That’s why in your sixth anniversary
I personally pay you tribute
I promise to visit you every day
And to defend you with courage.

Written by:
Ashley Carolina Mayorga
14 years old
(translated from Spanish)