

November Newsletter – Build a Bridge - It's Not Just a Bridge

As a little girl was fording the river one sunny afternoon, one of her flip flops came off of her foot. She began screaming to her brothers and sisters to help, as she helplessly watched her flip flop slowly float away. As she made it to the other side, she began to run....run as fast as she could along the shoreline, looking for an opportunity to retrieve her shoe. All of her brothers and sisters gave chase as well. The shoe floated farther and farther down the stream, with the little girl running along the bank of the swollen river. Then at a place where the river became a little wider and the current a little less swift, the little girl jumped in. She could not swim very well, and she struggled to make her way to the flip flop. At that moment, her brothers and sisters made a human chain to rescue their sister, who had already gone under once, firmly holding her flip flop. When they got her to shore, everyone rejoiced.

Then I asked Mike why this little girl would risk her life for a flip flop, was it because her parents would punish her for losing it? “No”, replied Mike, “it’s because that may be the only pair of shoes she will ever own, and she knows if she lost one, then the other would be no good to her, and she would then have to go barefoot.” And if you are reading this and not fully understanding it, let me explain. When a child is born in Nicaragua, the family starts saving for that child their first pair of shoes. And yes, many teenagers still wear the first pair of shoes given to them, and many have feet problems as a result. People are poor, and food quickly becomes a priority over shoes. Everyday is a struggle just to survive.

This reminds me of a story in my own life when my parents would buy me a new pair of shoes for school. But not the \$60 name brand ones from a department store, but a simple \$10 pair from the discount store. I was appreciative just to have a new pair, but at school they became known as BoBo’s, and I was teased by the other kids because my parents couldn’t afford the Nike or Reebok brand shoes. But one kid didn’t care, and became my first friend. Tragically, he drowned last year at Lake Wateree, but his name will be on the bridge plaque – a person who saw me for who I was and not for what I didn’t have.

What does all this have to do with the bridge? Well, how many of the community kids are teased by other school children because they have to cross a river on foot to go to school, because their community can’t afford to

build a bridge. That during the rainy season, they have to change out of their wet clothes when they get to school to the dry ones they pack. Then when they become adults and cross the river to go to work, packing dry and clean clothes is something they must continue to do on a daily basis. This bridge will be more than an economic stimulus, and do more than save lives, it will build self esteem, and give these people a sense of pride like they have never known. It's not just a bridge.