## Notre Dame #2

Where was I going? “Managua, Nicaragua,” I told the 2nd grade classroom that a good friend of ours was letting me help teach. The name had a nice ring to it, but by the time I returned a week later, Managua, Nicaragua would mean much more to me than just a rhythmic phrase. I went to visit my family there. I had met my uncle a few times before in the U.S., as he was American. My aunt and cousins, on the other hand, spoke only Spanish and had never been able to get a visa to visit us.

When I went there I had countless opportunities to use my Spanish with my family and friends, but I also learned a lot about life there. Poverty was everywhere. I saw it in the doctor’s office that had no running water in the bathroom as well as in my aunt’s one-room home that only had one sink outdoors for both the dishes and the laundry.

It was not just poverty that presented itself everywhere in Nicaragua; another part of life that was just as common was joy. Families were close to one another and everyone was so kind. People were willing to help one another, and they acted as though what little they had was enough for them. My cousin and I, for example, would play one-on-one soccer or shoot a basketball into the trashcan almost every day for fun. Even without much, we still enjoyed ourselves.

My aunt, although having enough training to be a pharmacist, could not pursue her dream because it would cost too much to hire a nanny for my little cousin with Down Syndrome. She still was happy. As I showed them pictures from my camera of life at home, I began to see things with a new perspective. At home I had been so engaged in my own little world full of extracurriculars and academic work that I had forgotten how important the little things were.

## I was worried about how well I would do in my dance competition; they were struggling just to survive. They were fortunate to go to school. They got excited over little presents. I realized that my daily concerns were so petty in comparison to their daily lives. They lived with such simplicity that I realized, although my sports and school work is important, personal connections with family and friends are much more vital to life. Those people understood how crucial love and familial relationships are, and I brought home more than just souvenirs from that vacation. I brought home a new perspective on life.