

Nicaragua: How it went from the body perspective

## Description

Dear Reader,

From yoga to Central America and back. I am happy to report that I needed very few of my Shaklee herbal Pain Relief tablets. I packed about 18 in my little emergency pill-box, plus 6 Aleve. In the airport back here in Seattle after sitting on the airplane for 10 hours and hauling the 2 rolling suit cases along miles of hall ways, I swallowed the last herbal remedy. There are still 4 Aleve in my box! I was amazed.

Exercise: practically impossible to get the usual exercise. Unconventional exercise opportunities came along frequently. In Managua, we all stayed in various homes clustered around the [Cultural Center](#) in the barrio of Batahola. After a 36 hour trip (we missed our plane leaving Seattle and had to re-book 18 hours later), Alicia (my granddaughter of 13) and I joined our group for tours of two collectives in which Nicaraguans produce products from local materials for sale locally. From there we headed for our home stays where, after meeting the family and unpacking my suitcase, I showered and washed the clothes I had on so long. This is the first exercise. One washes standing over a double sink, the washing side of which has an old-fashioned rubbing surface. You wet the clothes by dipping water from the larger of the two tubs and splashing it over the clothes and then scrubbing. Of course my delicate ExOfficio sports clothing wouldn't tolerate that kind of treatment. I used my laundry soap from home and gently got the sweat and grime out, rinsed over and over with dips from the water tub and finally hung the clothes on the lines strung in the patio over the concrete floor and potted plants all around the edge. Open to the sky, everything was dry in the morning.

There was no early to bed for us. Around 8:15 after dinner of rice and beans, fried bananas and steamed beets and a strange new root vegetable that had been boiled and mashed with butter (yummy), the family announced they were going to a concert. Would we like to come? Exhausted as we were, we chose to go along. We walked—three children, grandma and grandpa and daughter—to the main road (about 1/2 mile) and hailed a cab. Four adults and 3 children sat in the back seat with Don Encarnacion Nicaragua in front with the taxi driver. What a ride! The concert was a first gig for a talented young group with a clear, warm tenor; a rich sultry contralto and our family's friend, Ana, the back

up singer, violinist, flute player, castanet shaking beauty. The rhythm section included every sort of Latin drum and vibes, acoustic and electric guitars. The music rocked. The audience knew the words of all the popular songs from the Misa Campesina and their original tunes were haunting and worthy of a CD. The place was an outdoor bar, tables and people filling the concrete slab just below the stage area which was right in front of the serving bar. We were a bit late at 8:45 and sat at a table on the dirt slightly sloping floor along side the stage and right in front of the powerful sound system. No chance of nodding off. Huge bottles of Tona, the Nica beer, fried cheese and fried bananas and coke for the kids arrived. By mid-night I pleaded total exhaustion and the mother and children took us home in a cab while the seniors, Mr. and Mrs. Nicaragua stayed to the end. Amazing.

The next day, real exercise presented itself in a dance lesson at the cultural center led by probably one of the best group class exercise leaders I have had. We practiced the salsa, merengue, and several other steps I can't name. She had us stretching. Washing out those clothes and showering all over was a necessity after that work out. And no pain.

Was it the heat? Was it the vacation? Was it the clean diet of corn, beans, rice, vegetables and no wheat at all? Who knows. I was grateful.

Not to give you an entire travel log, but I want to mention a couple more exercise moments. We stayed a night in the lovely hill city of Matagalpa, where like Seattle, to get anywhere you have to walk up and down. At one moment I was able to take off alone and walk up hill. We would never permit that steep an incline for normal driving. On my way back down from a high point in front of a lovely house, I passed a woman about my age carrying 2 sacks of groceries, her face contorted in pain, breathing hard and resting often. I thought how fortunate I am to have all the self-care and practitioners to keep me in such good shape. I can elect to walk the hills of Matagalpa. She cannot.

Our group of 10 from Saint Mark's Cathedral was organized through [Matagalpa tours](#). We spent two nights in the campo, staying with farm people, members of the fair trade coffee collective, Cecocafen. Two from our group and I walked over a mile to get to our farm stay, again on gravel/dirt road that rolled with the hills up and down. At the house, visiting the bathroom was an athletic even. At night the doors were bolted with heavy iron bars which I had to lift and move, then removing a heavy beam holding the upper half of the door shut. Then I had to navigate a steep stone stair case down to a dirt slope that descended to the outhouse, being careful to duck under the clothes wire set to smack me right in the eye balls. A few stone steps up to the heavy wooden door to the two

hole latrine. I scoped out the outhouse trip during the day light and wore my head lamp. Oh, did I forget to mention that going down the outside stone steps included trying not to disturb a pile of dogs who slept there.

I was glad I had tucked in a therma-rest mattress to help me sleep on the 2 inch thick foam pad on a ply wood sheet on 4x4 legs of a bed.

Several in our group climbed an active volcano outside Leon, the colonial city in the western part of the country. I chose a city tour with two of the other older participants and we got to climb to the roof of the cathedral, a classic Spanish structure. The ring of fire around Leon is impressive and most residents have experienced ash in their homes and on their faces. It makes for very fertile soil and beautiful vegetables and fruits are produced on the mountain farms. We learned about the complex mixed farming of shade grown, organic coffee, tucked in with bananas, fruit trees as the upper story. Beans were ready for harvest, pineapple had just been planted, corn was bagged and carried by a yoke of oxen to a high place for winnowing the chaff. A little mechanical help from a small John Deer tractor would ease the hardship of these farmers' lives. They rise at 4 to shower in the dark, make tortillas and get their children ready in their blue trousers or shirts and spotless white shirts to walk the 1 1/2 miles to school by 7:30. What a pleasure to watch the children gather from the scattered farms to form a river of blue and white, each with their back pack, the 5 year olds holding hands with the older sisters and brothers.

At night, returning from our day exploring the area as a group, we walked home to our farm on a moonless clear night. Seldom have I seen such stars, the Milky Way so brilliant as to light our way with Orion leading to the south. Everyone was in bed by 8:30.

Our Saint Mark's group returned to Seattle last Monday and Alicia and I stayed another 6 days, she with her father and his family; I with a welcoming couple and their 40-year-old son living in Batahola, across from the Cultural Center. Here is a [link](#) in English where you can read about this remarkable place. I signed up for more of Carla's dance classes and met a great group of women who come twice a week to learn about nutrition, health (mini lectures between the merengue and salsa) and exercise. They were very welcoming and chatted me up with questions about the US and plenty of sharing about their work, families and home life. My Spanish was up to it, I am pleased to say.

My host mother is interested in prevention and nutrition and we had wonderful long conversations about herbs and vitamins and foods that help with her aches and pains. She is 61 and not taking any medications. She was #5 in a family of 12 and her parents

both lived into their 90's. Her grandmother lived in the mountainous countryside until her death at the age of 115. Besides keeping visitors for a small sum (room and 3 meals \$20 a day), Dona Cony made helado, a fresh popsicle sort of fruit ice cream. She made 5 flavors: one, chopped mango, banana, watermelon, cantaloupe, and something else, vanilla and cinnamon poured into 1/2 cup sized plastic bags and tied by hand and frozen. Other flavors are coconut, cocoa, cherries ground fine and mixed with milk, and a slightly fermented concoction of pineapple and some other fruits that she first cooks to get the acid out and then skims, added a bit of rum and other flavors and largish pieces of banana. I didn't get to try this one and had to content myself with helping. They sold for 5 cordobas. 23 cordobas = \$1. She doesn't advertise. There is no sign. People come from all over the neighborhood and beyond to buy one or a dozen at a time. I explained that such cottage industry would require an enormous amount of red tape here in the States. They let the buyer beware and the seller maintains a spotless kitchen. One bad batch and she'd be out of business. News travels fast, especially when it is bad.

I'll get back to the wonderful topic of preventing and managing arthritis next Monday.

Be well and Do well and most of all, keep moving!

Betsy

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**Date Created**

March 5, 2012

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