

## Jennifer Carreiro

During my first semester at Vanier we had a guest speaker, Mark Prentice, visit our class to discuss study trip to Nicaragua that was being prepared. I knew without a doubt that I wanted to go. Right away I started saving for this trip. Two semesters and many meetings later we were on our way to



beautiful Nicaragua. During our preparation meetings we were told that the focus of the study trip would be gender issues, the environment and social justice.

I had in mind that going to Nicaragua or participating in any international project like this would change me and the way I see things. How could it not? I was going to be out of my comfort zone for a significant amount of time and I would be faced with numerous new experiences and impressions. For the most part I was right— it did change me, my views and way of seeing life. However, I was wrong about one thing: I did not feel out of my comfort zone. In fact, I felt as if I had already lived this experience before. It's true that I did have to get use to some things, but that came fairly quick. The main reason I was able to feel comfortable so quickly was definitely because of the love and warmth that my host family gave me and also because of the support from my Canadian friends and teachers.



An average day in the rural village of Los Jovitos involved waking up around 7-7:30, showering, eating, helping out or just trying to learn some of my family's morning routines. Their routines included

making of the tortillas, washing clothes by hand, sweeping and going to get water. I would talk with my older sisters and play games with the kids; they loved coloring, learning hand games, and playing soccer. Each day, the Vanier group would meet up and we would participate in an activity such as trying out some local work practices like weaving a carpet or turning a sugar cane mill. Every day we would have a meeting with some significant figure to speak about topics such as gender, environment and social justice. We met and spoke to the deputy of our municipality, the previous and recent mayor of the district, a married couple who were involved and active in their community— the husbands focus was on protecting the environment and the wife’s focus was on empowering women and giving educational workshops, about women’s rights. Through these meetings we learned a great deal about Nicaraguan perspectives, ideas and feelings, and then applied these views to our study topics.

An innumerable amount of amazing and unforgettable things happened during my stay in Nicaragua, but I have my favorites. The time we spent at the river or “*rio*” was unforgettable because it was just pure fun. It was the place we connected with our friends from Canada and Nicaragua; we’d talk, play soccer or volleyball, jump into the river or just sit down and sip on some pineapple juice, freshly squeezed! There are some people I came to know that I’ll never forget.



One of these people was my second to oldest sister in my family whose name is Marlenes. Marlenes was actually the first family member I met; she was someone who made my stay meaningful because I would talk to her about the family life and family situations and she was so open with me. I’d also talk to her about my life in Canada. She told me that she had trained to be a nurse that she had her diploma but she couldn’t find a job in this field. She went on to get another diploma in another field; this time she went to get training in esthetics, received her diploma and once again couldn’t find a job.

Marlenes has 2 diplomas and can't get a job in either field. She has faith that one day she'll find a good job and be able to put her training into practice.

Another person from my host family that I loved was my brother, his name is Carlos, and he's fifteen



years old and hasn't been in school for the past 2 years. Not because he doesn't want to but because he can't; he's the only man of the house, his father works on the bus and doesn't come home everyday so it's up to Carlos to take care of the man's tasks such as herding the cows. However, there's no need to feel sorry for Carlos. I'm sad he won't complete

high school but he's such a happy person, he makes his family happy, takes care of them, and plays with his little nieces. He deserves to be remembered for the great person he is, and that's how all the people of los Jovitos should be remembered, as the warm hearted, loving, welcoming and happy people they are.

Finally I'd like to thank my family for supporting me throughout the whole process of the trip. To every single one of the girls Niki, Johanna, Lils, Layal, Jane, Sam I love you and it couldn't have been a better group, the teachers Sam and Catherine you were amazing. Thank you to Melanie who took all the craziness of planning a trip like this and made it seem



so easy. Thanks to the Vanier foundation whose donation is greatly appreciated, a thank you to the VCSA who also contributed financially.

If you're a student and you're reading this and thinking that you'd love to have an experience like this, to live in a rural community and participate in an educational study trip, then you should do it. No hesitations. But if you reading this and thinking "Oh wow, I'd never be able to live like that, use an outhouse and take bucket showers!" then you're the best candidate for this type of trip, you should do it just to prove to yourself that yes you can! And you will learn that it's not all that scary and you'll see that the benefits of the experience outweigh the fear.

