
This is the typical packing list for an American student travelling to Nicaragua. But in the case of the Global Sustainability and Service trip we also needed work gloves and an open mind. Fourteen students from CSU embarked on the first-ever alternative winter break to Nicaragua in January 2015, and I was lucky enough to be one of them. The objective of our journey was to work with Bridges to Community, a non-profit volunteer-driven organization, to facilitate community development in the small community of Rosa Grande, Nicaragua.

We lived completely off the grid in Rosa Grande for one week while we spent our days gardening, building latrines and stoves, hiking on the muddiest trails I have ever seen, or doing our best to communicate with our hosts through the art of “Spanglish” (Spanish and English). We would get our hands dirty all morning, have mini-classes about Nicaraguan culture and history in the afternoons, and reflect on our experience each night. On the last work day in Rosa Grande our entire group worked at one house to finish a stove and a latrine for a family and seeing how grateful they were for those simple things was such a beautiful thing!
Nicaragua possesses a startling contrast between awe-inspiring landscapes and rich culture against extreme poverty and a tumultuous political history. This fact didn’t seem to faze the members of Rosa Grande, they were some of the happiest, optimistic people I’ve ever met. And our Bridges to Community leaders, Jilmer and Hugo, were the epitome of this passion for life. They kept us laughing throughout the entire trip and cared for us like we’d known each other for years. If it hadn’t been for them, our experience would have been very different.

This trip not only centered on empowering members of the Rosa Grande community and sharing our cultures with each other, but for me it was a trip of self-reflection. Reflecting on the state of the world, my place in it, and values and identities I’ve held on to for so long. This experience changed all of us, for the better I like to think. Despite some minor set-backs like persistent bug bites and restless nights with the rooster crowing we kept our heads high and our attitudes positive. Jilmer would tell us all the time “Will be a wonderful day” (also the title of this narrative), and each day was truly wonderful!

I even made a sign to hang in my room reminding me that each day has the potential to be wonderful!