

Team Member – Cheryl

Cheryl Black, 33 - *“It would be a shame to go through life and not take the opportunity to share with and serve others.”*

Cheryl’s passport arrived just hours before the team was scheduled to leave for the airport! That was the ultimate validation Cheryl needed to know that she was meant to be in Nicaragua teaching.

“A year ago, I bought Oprah’s *Live Your Best Life* book, which contained inspirational stories and articles about people and relationships,” she shared. “There was a section in there about finding your place in this world.” Cheryl shares an excerpt from her journal written on that day:

“Dusted off my Oprah book to take to work for inspiration and began to cry as I thumbed through the pages of world service, giving back, etc.. as I thought of what it’d be like to give up everything for a period and go abroad to do missions work. Could I possibly find my soul, my spirit there? It’s all a bit scary, a bit overwhelming, yet so exciting at the same time. I can’t wait for what God has for me and I listen for His call....”

She found out about the World Hope International teaching team through her church bulletin less than a month later and knew at that instant that was what God wanted her to do. The excerpt below is from her journal the day she read the announcement.

“Very early into church, Nikki [friend] pointed out the bulletin request for teachers to participate in a missions trip. I immediately began to cry. It required no thought. I knew I’d have to find a way to pull it off. Reminded me of a few weeks back when the Oprah book caught my attention and I bawled that day while considering my ‘worldly’ purpose...”

Cheryl’s experience has been mostly in elementary special education, and she is currently on hiatus from teaching while she wraps up her Master’s degree in High School Guidance Counseling. Her initial fear was not being able to connect with the teachers. Her empathy came from reminding herself that they had nothing else to compare it to. “But I knew how much better it could be. Then again, how



do we know if it could better?! Maybe living simply is what's best for us all," she wondered. "Knowing that they may never see the things I take for granted is a very heavy feeling."



The teachers were 180 degrees different from what she'd initially expected them to be in terms of language experience, social, and economic status. Their level of gratitude was humbling and based on the feedback she received from the teachers, "...I must have succeeded in sharing knowledge and connecting with them despite the language barrier".

When she got a chance to visit two schools, she hadn't known what to expect and in turn had prepared herself for the worst. "I see those classrooms over and over again, and they are embedded in my memory." The hardest part for her, she thought, was being submerged in the culture and not just passing through it as a tourist. It was enlightening and definitely enriching for Cheryl.

"I would love to come back to Nicaragua to prove to the teachers that I've learned more Spanish, and to also have an opportunity to follow up with them and their progress", she said. "I want to continue fostering the relationship I've already begun".

Cheryl's hobbies include running, photography, gardening, cooking, and volleyball. She currently volunteers with Girls on the Run, and Big Brothers, Big Sisters. "Volunteering and mission trips should be everyone's civil duty," she stressed. "Have an outreach trip replace a family vacation. It is about the same cost anyways, but much more fulfilling and spiritually rewarding."

