June 2015

Director
1 Greetings
1 Her Words by Pilar Alfaro

Family Development
3 Kids Misbehave Within 10 Minutes of Spanking: SMU Study
4 Older Adults Who Volunteer are Happier, Healthier

Nutrition Education
5 Alligator Meat: A High Protein, Low Fat, White Meat
5 You CAN Eat Healthy
6 Americans Spending More on Eating Out than on Groceries

Personal and Family Finance
7 NeighborWorks Consumer Finance Survey
7 Paying for College
8 Economic Impacts of Parental Leave
8 Costs of Childcare
Greetings

Summer Session at UI officially started today, May 18th. I am completing my portion of the communicator much earlier than normal as I will be leaving the country for two weeks starting this Wednesday. I am traveling to Guatemala with textile and apparel colleagues from around the country. We will be visiting several locations and working with “Mayan Hands” organization. I am excited for this trip; weaving has always been my passion, and this will be my first time in a country south of Mexico.

International travel and work are such an important part of what we do and who we are in Family and Consumer Sciences. I take every opportunity provided to encourage our faculty and students to take advantage of international travel experiences. We will have another group leaving for Ghana about the time I return from Guatemala. Dr. Ramsay has several graduate students accompanying her on this year’s trip.

During Winter Session, the break between semesters, one of our undergraduates in Apparel, Textiles and Design participated in a volunteer project in Nicaragua. Pilar Alfaro turned this into an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of women’s lives in Nicaragua by enrolling in a directed study course for her volunteer project. What follows is Pilar’s story and the Words of Nora, the woman she interviewed while in Nicaragua.

**Her Words**

*by Pilar Alfaro*

Nora began working on the Santa Julia coffee plantation on her 10th birthday under the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza. Not unusual considering her mother was a widow, Nora, and her brothers and sisters needed to contribute everything they had to give; time, energy and commitment to the family. Two years later, Nora found herself in a dangerous, but not uncommon situation with the owner of the plantation. By refusing to be sexually abused, she was fired and was forced to hide to avoid threats and other harassments from the community. Without her contribution, Nora had to look elsewhere for work to support her family. On her own she found new work and found love. After realizing her abusive partner had caused her to lose her first child, Nora was once again forced to leave. Through the words of other workers, she learned the Santa Julia plantation was under new direction and she could return home to her family and continue to work.

For many years Nora’s life consisted of long work days from six in the morning to ten at night, cooking 100 pounds of rice each day to feed the workers and supervisors on the plantation. Feeding her own family of seven children was another matter of its own and resulted in the loss of four babies. The long days seemed to be nothing compared to the pain and suffering she had endured so far. Nora wanted a better life for her three children and encouraged them to pursue their education. The nearest secondary school was an 8 kilometer walk and a 5 Cordoba (18 cent) bus ride away. This pursuit wasn’t easy and Nora felt helpless in providing this for her children, but over time her two oldest boys were able to attend with just one notebook in hand.

With her children gone raising their own families, Nora found her comfort within the coffee plantation. There she and seven other women started a cooperative to establish profit in the isolated community of Santa Julia with its 400 inhabitants. The women, along with their families work to pick, wash, shell, roast, package and sell their own coffee all without

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modern tools. Gender equality in the Santa Julia community is more progressive than other areas in Nicaragua. They have been able to establish an organized and safe environment to grow their business and establish families.

A Nicaraguan based NGO called Panorama also provides the cooperative with volunteer services. Panorama focuses on economic development projects to communities in need throughout the country and believes in justice and social action. Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and with the help from NGO organizations, communities like the one in Santa Julia can greatly benefit. I was fortunate enough to experience the work Panorama does over winter break through the UI Volunteer Center’s alternative service break program. Along with 14 other students and faculty we traveled to Managua, Nicaragua two days before the New Year. Together we learned everything we could about the country, its history, the people of Santa Julia and what we could do for them.

We spent the next two weeks going through the coffee process and getting to know the welcoming families in the community. Our biggest project was building a covered porch in what they considered to be the central hub to the cooperative. The days were spent mixing cement, shoveling dirt, playing with the children, mixing more cement, coffee breaks (a lot of coffee breaks), laying cement, painting and overall making everything as structurally sound as we could with the lack of modern tools. In the past I have done multiple service projects requiring tough labor, but nothing exhausted me more than the kind of work we did in those two weeks. That being said, no other kind of service work had given me more satisfaction when we finished.

The extended porch our team built in the two weeks spent in the Santa Julia.

The moment we finished was such an empowering feeling and the way the women held us and cried made it even more clear what kind of impact we had actually made. They said they never thought that this kind of porch would be something they would have; it was something they had only dreamt about. But with the help from Panorama and our large group of eager volunteers, we made it possible. I can only hope that they understand the kind of impact they made on us in turn. The amount of love and compassion they shared with us, whether it was shown through playing with the children or feeding us pounds of rice and beans, it was well received by every member in our group. What made even more of an impact was knowing the backgrounds of the strongest women in the community and watching them working just as hard as we were and at times, harder. Women like Nora, who didn’t have much to give but loved with everything they had. Through the words and thoughts Nora and the other women in the cooperative, we heard stories of abandonment, murder, loss and poverty. But, what really showed through were their courage, strength, prayer and faith.

Having never been out of the country before, it was more than I prepared for but in the best way. I always imagined that traveling out of the country would feel like an entirely different planet. In a lot of ways it was like experiencing a new world, but at the same time it felt like a home that I was visiting for the first time.
Kids Misbehave Within 10 Minutes of Spanking: SMU Study

A new study based on real-time audio recordings of parents practicing corporal punishment discovered that spanking was far more common than parents admit, that children were hit for trivial misdeeds and that children then misbehaved within 10 minutes of being punished.

Advocates of corporal punishment have outlined best practices for responsible spanking. But real-time audio from this study revealed that parents fail to follow the guidelines, said psychologist George Holden, who is lead author on the study and a parenting and child development expert at Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

The real-time audio interactions revealed that parents were not always calm, as the guidelines recommend, but instead were often angry when they spanked or hit their child; they didn’t spank as a last resort; and they gave spankings for minor infractions, not just serious misbehavior. And while many spanking advocates recommend hitting children no more than twice, parents in the audio recordings were slapping and hitting their children more often.

“From the audio, we heard parents hitting their children for the most extraordinarily mundane offenses, typically violations of social conventions,” Holden said. “Also, corporal punishment wasn’t being used as a last resort. On average, parents hit or spanked just half a minute after the conflict began.”

Parents who used corporal punishment in the audio commonly violated three of the six “use” guidelines the researchers examined: Spank infrequently, use it only for serious misbehavior, and only as a last resort.

“The recordings show that most parents responded either impulsively or emotionally, rather than being intentional with their discipline,” Holden said.

Parents agreed to wear tape recorders to capture home interactions. The unique recordings captured parent and child interactions in 33 families over the course of four to six evenings. Parents volunteered to wear the recorders; most were mothers who were home with their children after a day’s work. The recordings captured 41 instances of corporal punishment, mainly during everyday activities such as fixing supper and bathing children.

More than 80 percent of the moms were married and had completed more education than the general population. About 60 percent were white and worked outside the home, and their children averaged just shy of 4 years old.

In 90 percent of the incidents, noncompliance was the immediate cause, such as sucking fingers, eating improperly, getting out of a chair, and going outside without permission. In 49 percent of the incidents, the parent sounded angry prior to spanking or hitting. On average, less than 30 seconds elapsed from the time when parents initiated nonviolent discipline to when they used corporal punishment. In 30 of the 41 incidents, the children misbehaved again within 10 minutes of being hit or spanked. The youngest child hit was 7 months old. One mother hit her child 11 times in a row.

Most remarkably, the researchers noted an unusual finding: The rate of corporal punishment exceeded estimates in other studies, which relied on parents self-reporting. Those studies found that American parents of a 2-year-old typically report they spank or slap about 18 times a year.
“The average rate we observed using the real-time audio equates to an alarming 18 times a week,” Holden said.


Keyword: parenting.

Older Adults Who Volunteer are Happier, Healthier

Older adults who stay active by volunteering are getting more out of it than just an altruistic feeling—they are receiving a health boost!

A new study, led by the Rotman Research Institute at Baycrest Health Sciences and published online in Psychological Bulletin, is the first to take a broadbrush look at all the available peer-reviewed evidence regarding the psychosocial health benefits of formal volunteering for older adults.

Lead investigator Dr. Nicole Anderson, together with scientists from Canadian and American academic centres, examined 73 studies published over the last 45 years involving adults aged 50-plus who were in formal volunteering roles.

To be included in the review, studies had to measure psychosocial, physical and/or cognitive outcomes associated with formal volunteering—such as happiness, physical health, depression, cognitive functioning, feelings of social support and life satisfaction.

“Our goal was to obtain a more comprehensive view of the current state of knowledge on the benefits of volunteering among older adults,” said Dr. Anderson, a senior scientist with Baycrest’s Rotman Research Institute and associate professor, University of Toronto. “We discovered a number of trends in the results that paint a compelling picture of volunteering as an important lifestyle component for maintaining health and wellbeing in later years.”

Among the key findings:

• Volunteering is associated with reductions in symptoms of depression, better overall health, fewer functional limitations, and greater longevity.
• Health benefits may depend on a moderate level of volunteering. There appears to be a tipping point after which greater benefits no longer accrue. The “sweet spot” appears to be at about 100 annual hours, or 2-3 hours per week.
• More vulnerable seniors (i.e. those with chronic health conditions) may benefit the most from volunteering.

Feeling appreciated or needed as a volunteer appears to amplify the relationship between volunteering and psychosocial wellbeing.

“Taken together, these results suggest that volunteering is associated with health improvements and increased physical activity—changes that one would expect to offer protection against a variety of health conditions,” said Dr. Anderson. Indeed, a moderate amount of volunteering has been shown to be related to less hypertension and fewer hip fractures among seniors who volunteer compared to their matched non-volunteering peers.

One troubling finding for the research team was that “very few studies” have examined the benefits of volunteering on cognitive functioning in older adults. The report noted that “not a single study” has examined the association between volunteering and risk of dementia, or the association between volunteering and a host of other health conditions that put seniors at higher risk for dementia, such as diabetes and stroke.

With dementia prevalence projected to double over 20 years, from over 30 million people worldwide today to more than 65 million people in 2030 (Alzheimer’s Disease International and World Health Organization, 2012), Dr. Anderson called it a “startling omission” that the field of neuroscience research has yet to investigate the capacity of volunteering to mitigate dementia risk or delay onset.


Keywords: senior, volunteering, health.
Alligator Meat: A High Protein, Low Fat, White Meat

Florida is known for Disney World, EPCOT, Universal Studios and now alligator meat. Alligators are being raised in approximately 30 alligator farms, and their meat has increased in price from $4 to $5 a pound between 1980 and 2010 to $8.25 in 2013. If you want wild alligator meat, it will cost about double, at $12-$15 a pound.

Why has alligator meat become so popular? In part, it has been featured on cable television shows such as the Travel Channel’s “American Grilled,” Animal Planet’s “Gator Boys” and the History Channel’s “Swamp People.”

In the late 1980s, alligators were an endangered species, but now there are more than one million in just Florida. Business is very good for the approximately 30 Florida farmers that raise alligators for their meat and hides. As one stated, “We sell everything we produce and haven’t had to spend any money or time on promoting it.”

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services describe alligator meat as being “a fine light-grained textured white meat that tastes similar to pork and chicken.” Nutritionally, a 3.2 ounce portion (about the size of a deck of cards) contains 232 calories, 46 grams of protein, 4 grams of fat (none is saturated), and 0 mg of cholesterol and sodium. That makes it a lean, heart-healthy protein source. On their website, they have a recipe for “Alligator scaloppini with sauce Dijon.”

For those of you who don’t have easy access to alligator meat, some of the alligator farmers are developing alligator sausage and patties that will be on the grocery shelves within a year. Bon appé’tite.


Keyword: protein.

You CAN Eat Healthy

What is the best way to get people to eat healthy? According to researchers at Cornell University, three factors help people choose healthier items: (1) Convenience (C), (2) Attractive (A), and (3) Normal (N). This CAN approach may be more effective than telling people what they shouldn’t eat or asking them to use willpower to avoid tempting food.

Lead researcher Dr. Brian Wansink stated, “Willpower works for some, but only about 5 to 10 percent of the population.” Since people make approximately 200 food-related decisions a day, most of
them are quick and instinctive. People are more likely to make the healthy food choice if it is easy, if it looks attractive, and is normal or accessible.

Here is an example of incorporating this CAN concept to get people to eat more fruit in the home: Place two types of fresh fruit (e.g. apples and oranges) in an attractive bowl that is close to where people walk by. They will be drawn to the fruit, will have two options to choose from, and may pick it up as they walk by it. When they get hungry, they have something to eat which may prevent them from selecting a less healthy option.

Displaying the fruit is better than storing it in the refrigerator in the bottom drawer where it is out of sight and out of mind.

The CAN approach is used in reverse for those less healthy food options. Keep them off the kitchen counter and in the back of a cupboard where they are harder to access. Wansink keeps his less nutritious snacks in the laundry room cupboard.


Keyword: healthy diet.

### Americans Spending More on Eating Out than on Groceries

In January 1992, the Commerce Department started tracking the amount of money American consumers spent monthly on groceries ($27.8 billion) and on eating out ($17.2 billion). Until recently, grocery expenditures were always higher than eating out expenditures. As this graph shows, in March 2015, eating out expenditures ($50.7 billion) were higher than grocery expenditures ($49.8 billion).

A market research firm called NPD Group found that 23 percent of the total restaurant purchases are completed by younger millennials, those 18 to 28 years-old. The National Restaurant Association suggests that millennials view dining out as a social event (i.e. a chance to connect). They tend to favor fast food, deli food and pizza restaurants over coffee shops, high-end dining and casual dining.

There seems to be a generational shift in money spent eating out. A November 2014 Gallup poll found that baby boomers (age 51-69) are less willing to spend money eating out and more likely to spend money on groceries.


Keyword: groceries.
NeighborWorks Consumer Finance Survey

According to a recently released NeighborWorks America survey, “Many U.S. adults lack emergency savings but few turn to nonprofits.” Even though Extension is not often thought of as a typical nonprofit, this finding supports the concern that Extension programs are frequently not sought out when a person or family experiences a financial crisis.

Highlights of the survey include:
- 34% of adult Americans have no emergency savings in place;
- 25% have only enough money saved to get by for less than one month if there was a sudden job loss or other financial emergency;
- The most vulnerable are those with lower incomes, people of color, individuals with less education, and young adults; and
- 75% of adults don’t know that quality financial advice and information at low or no cost is available in many communities.

Even though the economy is recovering and unemployment is lower than recent years, many adults are having difficulty building emergency savings. Many families are still digging out of the financial hole created during the Great Recession. In addition, housing and food costs are rising.

The good news is that this second annual survey “found a sharp increase in the number of adults who would be willing to work with nonprofits to help build financial capability.” More than half (59%) of the nationally representative sample of 1,035 adults were interested in working with a nonprofit to set goals and to achieve them. The opportunities for Extension educators to provide programs helping individuals and families set and achieve goals and increase financial capability are expanding.


Keywords: emergencies, savings, nonprofits.

Paying for College

A study of 1,010 adults in March, 2015 conducted by the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) revealed that “If they had to do it all over again, the majority of Americans would have paid for college differently. More than two-thirds (68%) of adults with college loans or whose children have loans said they regret how they financed their own or their children’s education.

Four out of five respondents questioned at least one decision they made about their education including: wishing they had attended college to qualify for higher-paying jobs (68%), going to a less expensive school (54%), going to a trade school to prepare for a specific job (43%), and delaying going to college in order to save more money first (27%). A full 84 percent of respondents said, “If given the chance, they would change at least one of the choices they made about it.”

Choices made have especially impacted Millennials, when education has not yet translated into financial opportunity due to an uncertain job market and increased student loan debt.

Economic Impacts of Parental Leave

The United States and Papua New Guinea are the only 2 countries out of 185 that do not have a standard maternity leave for women. “In America some women who work for the federal government or larger firms can take 12 weeks’ unpaid leave after giving birth. In a handful of states new mothers get a few weeks at a low wage, funded by payroll tax. By contrast, in Britain new mothers can take a year off, and during much of it part of their salary is replaced by the government. Sweden grants more than a year’s paid maternity leave—even to women who were not previously employed.”

What is the economic impact on American women? As with most situations, there are two viewpoints. “Mothers who struggle to combine work with child care often sacrifice work. That lowers their lifetime earnings and leaves them and their children more likely to end up poor.” On the other hand, women who take long periods off from work to care for children may lose their competitive edge as their skills grow rusty, they fail to gain experience and promotions, and they have shorter lifetime tenure in which to save for retirement.

The Economist authors suggest that paid paternity leave offers many benefits. “Nearly half the world’s countries now offer new fathers short periods at home; a growing number let mothers cede some maternity leave to their partners while they go back to work.”

The benefits? Fathers learn how to be better parents and the short-term bonding may lead to a larger role in child-rearing years later. Mothers also benefit. “If both sexes are likely to take time off for child care, there is less temptation for employers to discriminate against women.” Research has shown that more hands-on fathering helps reduce the “second shift” syndrome with women doing more child care and housework “which is a big reason why many mothers work part-time or in jobs for which they are overqualified.”


Costs of Childcare

According to the Parents and the High Cost of Child Care: 2014 Report (http://www.naccrra.org/costofcare) prepared by Childcare Aware of America, eleven million children younger than age five are in some form of child care in the United States. The cost is “one of the most significant expenses in the family budget.”

Costs vary significantly depending on where the family lives, number and ages of children, and the child care options available to them. According to CNN Money (http://money.cnn.com/interactive/news/economy/child-care-costs), a two-parent family in Idaho will spend an average of 11.1 percent of their annual income on childcare for their infant.

Cost may be a major reason that the percentage of mothers staying at home and not working (29%) is the highest at any time in the past two decades according to Pew Research analysis of 2012 census data (http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/08/rising-cost-of-child-care-may-help-explain-increase-in-stay-at-home-moms). Having more than one child under age 5 also helps to drive the trend.

Keywords: student loans, debt, savings.