

Another Leap of Faith — Leaping. Leaping. Leaping. Gone! May 2, 2009
PeaceWorks' 55th Cargo Container Shipment To Nicaragua — by Jim Burchell

At a time of economic crisis in our nation, as well as a global crisis that has hit nations like Nicaragua even harder, we wondered if our attempt to do it again, to collect and pack enough materials to fill a 45 foot cargo container with life-affirming aid, would work its magic once more, that all the little miracles that occur to make these shipments happen would result in another collective leap of faith. As some New York City radio sports announcers might put it: *"We done did dat!"*

As always we are inspired by and driven to take these leaps by our Nicaraguan partner organizations, the primary recipients of the materials on the aid shipments; Inhijambia reaching out to young boys and girls living on the streets of Managua they have served so doggedly over the years: FEDICAMP working with rural communities in Northern Nicaragua to reforest their watersheds, to develop sustainable agriculture, to grow nutritious foods for their families; the Masaya Women's Collective's literacy and empowerment programs; MASINFA's efforts to renew impoverished neighborhoods by building low-cost housing taking; another leap of faith — our 55th — in response to these multiple hopes and inspirations, we got it all in and then some. Here's the story.

It takes many small steps to make the huge leap that makes for the loading of a 45-foot cargo container, steps taken by a wide array of people from all walks of life. It takes the determination of Michael McCabe, our truck driver/packer extraordinaire who picks up the cargo container at the port, gets the huge contraption through the narrow streets of Plainfield to the parking lot of the United Presbyterian Church, and then finally guides volunteers in packing the container, utilizing every cubic centimeter of space by cramming every nook, cranny, and crack with life-affirming aid — and throw in some jokes, songs, and wisdom throughout the day.

We started this shipment collection with a bit of a cushion by having one of the storage rooms made available to us by United Presbyterian Church almost full with supplies. We wanted to get those materials and bicycles onto this container, so we took on fewer shipping partners. But there is no holding back the generosity of our supporters, so the worry becomes will we have to put even more supplies back into storage at the end of all the packing and loading. In the week before the shipment day, people like Jim Virosco of Florham Park kept me busy (and got me increasingly more worried). Jim scours local church rummage sales for remnants, as well as collecting and processing lots of bicycles. So not only did I go to his house once to pick up over 40 bicycles along with tools and toys, I had to go back again to pick up more bikes and other materials.

Naomi Theisz of the Washington Township Volunteer Ambulance Corps provides crutches, walkers, wheelchairs, stretchers, and more. And then there is all the stuff that I had collected and packed in my garage. That, along with Jim's and Naomi's materials, constituted the first load put into the container on Friday afternoon, May 1 at the Pioneer Freight shipping yard in Whippany where Michael, my son Brandon, Guy Talbot, and I offloaded the 15 ft truck, packing the materials tightly onto the container. Once that was done, I was back to Jim Virosco's to load up more of his stuff and home to my garage where another huge assortment of supplies awaited. "Too much", I continued to worry. "How are we going to pack up all this stuff? And it may rain on loading day to boot!"

Now onto the May 2 loading at the United Presbyterian Church in Plainfield that provides the location for the loading, two storage rooms, not to mention the wonderful lunch spread that revives all the volunteers — special thanks to Ship Hansen who has made this happen for us for so many years. Brandon and I arrived with my reloaded 15 footer, then Michael with the container, then a few people drop off their donations, then more and more until organized confusion reigns through which much packing, sorting, and loading takes place. Cleta Ciulla, Bill Paolino, and friends from Rockland County, New York came in with a huge truckload for San Marcos, Jinotega, and Omotepe — our major shipment partner for the day.

Lorna and Will Henkel brought family members and friends from Secaucus to provide major help throughout the day. Then there's the Christ Church Summit members led by Marilyn Devroye and Dan Ocone, who brought in a truckload mostly for Inhijambia's program for the street kids of Managua. Guy Talbot followed up his Friday performance by working again in the nose of the container with Brandon, joined also later by his son Joshua and wife Elmis. A huge extended family of caring and action, folks like Barbara Howard, Peggy Waldman, Esther Chavez in town from Georgia, Nancy Myska, Theresa Fitzgibbon, hard-packing Dr. Ray Monahan, David Mastrodonato, Denis Johnston and his Just Faith friends. Oh, and my 15 foot truck crammed with an assortment of supplies? All sorted and packed by a group led by Will and Ed Henkel. The rain threatened, the clouds delivering some drops but mostly just more to fret about during the day. *(As with all of the shipments the leap can be a frenzied experience. Please accept my apologies if I have not mentioned you by name — you are certainly in my heart with the deepest gratitude.)*

We packed away medical supplies for the Jubilee House Community in Nueva Vida, Nicaragua that also so expertly maneuvers our containers through Nicaraguan customs and matches the materials with the recipient organizations. Our leap would not be made without their assistance. We packed up and loaded all the materials brought that day and dug deeply into the storage room to take out about three quarters of the materials that had been stored there — now we can collect and store more for our October 3 shipment.

At 8:37pm — the die-hard packers (Elmis Molina, Jim Burchell, Esther Chavez, Ray Monahan, Guy & Joshua Talbot, Lorna Henkel, Jim Sagurton, Nancy Myska, Jules Orkin, Brandon Friebur, and Michael McCabe) closed the cargo container doors, helped guide Michael and his truck out of the parking lot, and headed for food at the local Salvadoran restaurant and later rest and recovery. Here's the shipment inventory (made possible in ways by hundreds of people):

Clothes and shoes	236	School Supplies	62	Household	207
Office	20	Medical Supplies/Equipment	189	Sewing	30
Sports	38	Tools	102	Toys & Instruments	86 & 2
Bicycles	155	Computer Components	4	Total Items	1131