



Nicaragua, a Short Story

I took my second business trip to Managua, Nicaragua in 1996, on a consulting assignment to evaluate the viability of investing in a local bank that was focused on micro-lending to micro-businesses. My client was a multi-lateral bank that sought to invest in and support these businesses, which were a key part of the overall economy of Nicaragua.

I was picked up at the airport by a colleague who had other businesses in Nicaragua, and who had recently bought a new heavy-duty pick-up truck for those businesses. My hotel was across from the airport on the Pan American Highway, but my colleague wanted to go into Managua for drinks and dinner before checking me in.

By luck, I arrived on the afternoon of the 17th anniversary of the Sandanista Revolution. Masses of people came from the countryside into the capital city of Managua to celebrate and the celebrations included promoting student demonstrations and other political activities. When we arrived at the bar we learned that students had just taken over the airport that we had just come from.

My colleague was accustomed to such activities and was not particularly concerned. He wanted to simply relax and enjoy the evening before taking me back to my hotel. After quite a bit of food and drink, we drove in his brand new truck towards the hotel on the Pan American Highway. He told me not to worry, and he pulled a .25 caliber pistol out of the glove compartment. I laughed because the pistol looked like a toy in his meaty hand.

As we sped down the dark four-lane highway, we saw a roadblock made of burning boards and tires. There were about 30 people gathered around the area, demonstrating. I told my colleague to hit the brakes, but instead, he floored the truck and we drove right through the burning rubble, at about 80 mph.

I remember being amazed that we passed through very smoothly, as people scattered. I was also a bit surprised that no one shot at us after we passed through.

When we arrived at the hotel I strongly suggested that my colleague rent a room for the night, but he insisted on driving back to his residence in Managua (and back through the roadblock). The next morning he did not show up for breakfast, and he would not answer his phone. Much to my relief, he arrived and picked me up at about noon, showered, calm and collected. He had over-slept.

The next 18 days in Managua were peaceful, very pleasant, and I completed my work with colleagues from the bank. I gained a strong appreciation for the keys to the micro-lending business, completed my presentation, made several new friendships, enjoyed the tropical breeze every evening by the pool, and recommended an equity investment in the bank.