

NICARAGUA — TERRI ELLIS SEWING AND SOWING WITH THREADS OF HOPE

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LINKING GOD'S PEOPLE TO REACH THE UNREACHED

The Bridge Report



TERRI ELLIS: Shortly before our family's move from Upstate New York to **Louisville, Kentucky** in 2008, I began yearning for new purposes and ways to serve the Lord, asking Him to deposit in me a new revelation of His heart and a passion to give myself to it. It was clear that being active participants in the local church in Louisville was part of God's plan, but I had no idea what was next beyond that.

The "what's next" part of His revelation came in 2009 when I followed my daughter in her quest to learn about and pursue God's call to the mission field. She attended a college course called Perspectives on the World Christian Movement. As I listened in, God began to teach ME! What I had known mostly in my mind about God's love for people was now sewn and planted into my heart in a new and different way. I was captured by my Father's desire to draw each and every one of His children from every nation into a loving, open relationship with Him, with all cultures interacting with each other in lifestyles where Christ is magnified and our Father is glorified.

I realized that I had thought the job of the Great Commission was for "other people"- those with gifts of evangelism and pastoring; those who heard the call to be a missionary, like my daughter....not me! I was learning that we are ALL called to GO, to be either one who "Goes" or one who "Sends" "To be a sender, you must GO... at least once!" As much as I did not want to agree, I knew that if God did intend me to serve Him by supporting and sending others, it would be good for me to have a first-hand mission field experience. I also realized that God had just exposed my half obedience as personal fears. Strange food, gigantic bugs, terrible heat, long travel, nasty germs and viruses that my body hadn't experienced were only some of the apprehensions rooted in my mind.

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Nonetheless, I shared my thoughts with my pastor and asked if I could join him and his team in their annual mission trip to the island of **Ometepe** in **Lake Nicaragua** the following summer. He assured me that God had something useful for me to do, and He told me he had heard that a group of women meeting at the orphanage which our church team visits, had started a sewing group. Since I have loved sewing and crafting from an early age, he suggested that I help these ladies with sewing. He said, "You should tell them if they learn to sew well enough, perhaps they could start a business and earn extra money for their family." The idea seemed reasonable to me.

Looking towards the trip, I wondered what sewing supplies they had in Nicaragua; also, HOW I would sew with Nicaraguan ladies who spoke no English and me who spoke no Spanish! My apprehensions were resolved with an announcement in church that I was looking for donations of fabric, sewing supplies, and used sewing machines. Within three weeks, I was surrounded by a mountain of donations and found a young Hispanic woman who would interpret for me.

God had provided abundantly for the ladies of Ometepe! Our team was able bring 8 sewing machines and 10 suitcases filled with fabric and lots of donated sewing supplies. With tears of gratitude, the sewing teacher later told

me that for months, she would lead the women in the class in prayer, asking God to send them more sewing machines and fabric. What an answer!

After three days of sewing with my new friends with the help of my interpreter, I brought up the idea that perhaps in the future, they could start a sewing business. If they practiced all that I was showing them and learned to sew well,



they could make tote bags or other ladies purses like our project and sell them to make money. Just a few nodded reluctantly. It seemed they were convinced that selling sewn products and starting a business was beyond them and they really didn't want to do that. They had learned many new skills and now had more fabric, supplies and working sewing machines to create all sorts of clothing and home needs for their families

When I returned home, I concluded my trip to Ometepe had gone well. I had brought an abundance of sewing supplies from others who no longer needed them and had given them what I knew about sewing. I had made new friends with some of my fellow believers there; I had prayed with them and encouraged their faith. It had been a learning, growing and maturing experience. I thought the project was finished, until my pastor visited the island four months later.

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He returned telling me that the women had done everything I had told them! They had made many more tote bags and purses and were selling them to friends, family and neighbors. Two women traveled quite a distance to obtain a necessary fabric using precious money. One woman's husband bought a sewing machine so she could sew at home. Several were interested and serious about learning how to manage and profit from a sewing business! They had believed what I told them and did what I said. I marveled at the Holy Spirit's work!

I was immediately challenged. In four months the women of my sewing class rose up with determination and went beyond their comfort zone to reach the dreams and hopes I talked about. Should I not rise up myself and bring them the next steps of the vision that I had planted! Over the next several months, the Holy



Spirit began to pour out to me the vision and practical administration of a ministry what would be called **Threads of Hope**.

Now in its third year, **Threads of Hope** is a ministry tool for local churches to reach others with the Gospel message through the avenue of sewing. **Our goal is to sow and sew!** We sow seeds of hope that lives, lifestyles and whole communities will be changed by the Gospel message and by teaching people to sew.

With tools and instruction, Threads of Hope transfers the excess wealth of sewing materials from one area where they are no longer needed to others who can use them. We help to create ongoing relationships with supporting groups or organizations who will annually replenish sewing supplies, fabric and sewing machines to sewing centers. We work with each individual sewing center to help create products to sell, make patterns in the native language, and develop marketing strategies. We offer free lessons and fabric during an introductory period and help implement appropriate ways for each individual to acquire future lessons and materials.

We teach business and money management skills based on basic Biblical principles to encourage families to earn additional income from selling sewn items while sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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FROM R.K.'S CORNER

I first met Terri Ellis in 1979 while I was Principal of Love Inn's Elementary/Junior High school located near Ithaca, New York. It was part of a Christian community of hippies turned Jesus-people. Fresh out of college with a degree in Outdoor Education, Terri inquired if there was any teaching position open. While a student, God had given her a vision of integrated education, whereby all academic disciplines flow out of the knowledge of and relationship with God. I was impressed, as Terri's revelation fell exactly in step with our foundational approach to education from the inception of the school. I saw that Terri was a woman of faith, character, and vision. She taught full time for five years at Love Inn School. After she married and had young children, she chose to be a stay-home mom while managing a family business on the side.

Since then, our paths have intermittently crossed. In 2009, while visiting Ted and Dawn Sandquist in Louisville, Kentucky where Ted pastors *In Christ Church and Ministries* to which the Ellis family belong, Terri shared her dream and vision of **Threads of Hope**. I was thrilled to learn that God had given Terri a broader sphere of ministry to the nations with her teaching skills and gift of impartation. I saw Terri again in Upstate New York two weeks ago and got a fresh update — here it is for your edification! Please mark donations toward Terri's ministry **Threads of Hope**. To contact Terri directly, please call 502-432-0110 or go to our website for further info.

...Cont. from p. 3 To date, there are now two sewing centers on the island of **Ometepe**. Our vision is that this island of 40,000 will someday have many sewing centers and individual sewing businesses that will have a role in significantly changing the spiritual, social, and economic status of the island. Women are creating an income from their own businesses as well as joining together as a group to sell products and rent items such as Nicaraguan folkdance dresses.

As of August 2011, a church in **Alajuela, Costa Rica**, with over 15 women's small groups, called **Nueva Mujer (New Woman)**, has become a supporting organization that will replenish supplies for the sewing centers on the island of **Ometepe** in 2012. As a result, God has given this group of over 200 women from Costa Rica the desire to pray regularly for the women of **Ometepe, Nicaragua**. This is the realization of two cultures being sewn together! After serving and sowing towards God's purposes in Nicaragua first, this Costa Rican church is looking forward to using the concept of **Threads of Hope** as a ministry tool to reach women in Costa Rica for Christ in the near future.

At our home office in Louisville, Kentucky, we are working to begin two new sewing centers within the coming year and we are considering God's leading and direction towards many other requests from as far away as **Cambodia, Honduras, and Guatemala**. Churches and supporting individuals from various parts of the States graciously sacrifice and send fabric, machines and supplies to our home office.



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