

2020 SPIRIT YEAR END REPORT

First of all, I wish you all good health and that you will stay safe for a little longer. Hopefully the end is in sight.

The year, 2020, started with another trip to Guatemala. There were serious problems, more than usual. We are first of all, an English program plus high school. Our graduates and applicants tell us there are no jobs for high school graduates without a bi-lingual English level, as the economy is in a shambles. Our girls who are at 85% English are snapped up on the first interview and happily working for extraordinary salaries. The last one from 2020 is in her third week now.

At a school meeting in January, it became evident that the school wanted to close us down. There were unfounded accusations & demands that we lower our standards to a 70% GPA. This was unacceptable. The principal making the demand, told me there were no jobs for average students. We returned to the house, Dora in tears, to be met with an annual volunteer who was in shock over the 2nd grade primary math skills exhibited by our current high school graduate, now a test case in the English only program. Lastly, one of our second year students, who is now at about 65-70% (the 3 year program needs 85% for a job), received a final grade of 78%, by far the lowest anyone has ever received. Volunteers and I had been observing how much progress she had made to date in relation to others in the past. We have had problems with the non-English speaking teacher in the past, but told the girls to ignore the bad pronunciation, lack of spoken skills, etc and just placate the teacher and learn from the house. However, the teacher has escalated her destructive campaign and we can't have our fragile young women so discriminated against.

The Covid solution of reams of papers to fill in, also lacked academic validity and was undermining the girl's ability to learn English.

Rather than put our housemother through hell and have our girls denigrated because they were Spirit girls, we put heads together and have made a directional change, keeping in mind our mission and the reality of where the jobs are.

Starting in October, we were listed in Indesgua, a scholarship registry, as an English program only. Starting in 2021, our program will only be for high school graduates. The program will be intensive English lasting an expected up to 1 ½ years. For many, being in Coatepeque is a deterrent. With local "English academies" throughout the country, some do not see the need for living away from home. But there are advantages. They are stuck in a backwater, so there is less pressure to treat school as a pastime for a few hours a week, which has not worked for other English language organizations. They can't come and go as easily, omitting the Covid restrictions for the moment. English will be the required language after the first 2-3 months. Students who can't adhere to this will be sent home. There will not be many hours of high school papers to fill out, precluding English study time. Lastly, their instructors will be native English speakers, not illegals who learned English in the Atlanta streets, California lettuce fields or a book of fill-in-the-blanks.

Historically, few women could attend high school due to the extreme cost for the poor, so this was a gamble. I wasn't sure whether we would have applicants or not. However, there have been a

huge number of inquiries, including some male students (it is well noted for women only- ever hopeful?). After the interview process, we have accepted 14 new girls for 2021. All are high school graduates. All expressed frustration and knowledge that lacking English is why they were still unemployed or working for next to nothing. All know about the high pay for English speakers and want that salary for helping their families, being able to attend University which requires English, and the ability to just plain have a job. They are in a huge hurry to learn enough to do so. One woman is even leaving her two young children with grandma, so she can better provide for them.

We have a new addition to the program, in addition to the English Angel program. Graduate students in the Eastern Washington University ESL teaching program, will start teaching a beginners and an advanced group twice a week. This will be a rotating ongoing program that the University coordinator and her students are quite excited about. We are all working to be on the same page and this will eliminate the pronunciation problems we have had at the local school and add another degree of professionalism to the program. So girls in the program will be receiving formal English classes and continue to have the invaluable one on one support of their English Angel.

The graduate girls working and studying in Guatemala City are all working from our home. The big room is full of tables and computers with multiple monitors. They are all extremely happy with their jobs, income, and ability to help their families through this terrible time. One will be starting her last year of university in 2021 and two more have passed the university exams to start. They are busy people, but happy. I expect that most of the new girls will be joining them at the apartments in the next year or so, as they live far from the English jobs. The house was meant as a half-way house, but the location is a huge draw. They live in a safe neighborhood, are step away from the metro going directly to the University and they help each other. Rent is very reasonable. I get the feeling the future problem will be too many moving in and no one moving out. However, for now there is room. Other good news is reconnecting with previous girls on a similar path.

Unfortunately, for me, the year is ending on a sad-happy note. I was planning on being in Phoenix for the winter, but shortly after arrival, contacted Covid. It was my fault, as I finally agreed to lunching with a persistent friend inside a restaurant. I knew it was a bad idea, but did it anyway. The resulting choice was isolate alone in my camper without any medical care, unless I got really ill and called the ambulance, or race home to my Spokane doctor. I made the 28 hour driving time in 35 hours, in time to get to the only pharmacy before pre-Thanksgiving closing. That night started on 14 pills and was amazed to find heaviness in the lungs went away by the next day. Other symptoms took longer and I did little more than take pills and sleep for the next 9 days. Never had a fever, but other symptoms were enough. The most scary; the late arrival- foggy brain.

I am grateful to be alive, gaining strength and able to start making plans to return to Guate. The upside is that I have better immunity than any vaccine, at least for now.

So, thank you for your support for the program. You are making a difference, in spite of some rocks in the road. Have a wonderful, safe Holiday.

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