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Teachers find rewards in El Salvador

By **OSCAR RAMIREZ**
The Tattoo

Expecting a rural, underdeveloped nation when they came to El Salvador to teach, several English-speaking foreigners learned a lesson of their own - that the Central American nation is a vibrant country full of friendly people and eager students.

Teaching immerses foreigners - mostly from the United States, but also from Britain, Canada and Australia - into the Salvadoran culture. For some of them, it's a place they choose to call home.

First Impressions

Foreign teachers at the Escuela Panamericana in San Salvador said what they found when they came to the country wasn't the mud huts, donkeys and street vendors that they'd anticipated.

"I didn't had any direct information, just probably preconceived notions, mostly what was portrayed in the media and news," said Stephen Cobb of Tennessee, a 55-year-old elementary school teacher.

Lushanya Echeverria, a 29-year-old Native American fifth and sixth grade teacher from Arizona said she envisioned El Salvador as "green, rural, a lot of trees and not so many buildings" before arriving.

"I was expecting more of the downtown street vendors," she said. "I was expecting the supermarkets to be like that."

But El Salvador has come a long way from the days of its infamous civil war, when Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero's 1980 assassination drew worldwide attention to the Central American nation.

"I was brought up in a Catholic school, so I knew the Romero story," said first grade teacher Amy Pennock, 29, of Arizona.

What they didn't know was that El Salvador, a country

still in development, is a land with malls, freeways and modern homes made of cement.

The people

Private schools that employ foreign teachers usually provide them with housing, and some teachers live inside the school campus. The braver ones seek out an apartment in the city. But unlike some other Latin American nations, there is no "gringo ghetto." Foreign teachers say they find the language over there, you are ostracized from others.

"The kindness of the people is awesome," said Cobb. "As a foreigner, I don't feel like I am an outsider. And I know how it is for foreigners that go to the 'States.' If you don't know the language over there, you are ostracized from others."

The teachers said the people are the most fascinating thing about the nation.

"The country is wonderful, but the people who fill it are much more interesting than any landscape in the world," said Gena Mavuli, 29, an English teacher from Oregon.

Teachers said the fact that the Salvadoran people are sympathetic to foreign teachers makes their job more enjoyable.

"The students in El Salvador are a pleasure to teach," said British teacher Tom Jenner, 40, a high school biology teacher at the British School of El Salvador. "I know people that have taught all over the world for 13 years and they come to El Salvador and say, 'This is the best.' The students here are really nice."

The students are "not necessarily particularly hard-working," but he gets along with them well, said Jenner. "You actually get to know your students over here."

Students weigh in

One of the reasons bilin-

gual schools in El Salvador hire native English-speaking teachers is because they have to deliver a tough English curriculum to meet accreditation standards.

Students at the Escuela Panamericana like their foreign teachers because they see having them as a way they can learn more about other cultures.

"When they teach you English, you learn more vocabulary that is basic for native English speakers," said Jose Portillo, a 19-year-old junior.

Junior Cindy Urbina said, "It's cool because when they teach you, for example, history, you can see they actually know what they're talking about."

Since foreign teachers project their culture and background through their teaching, students learn more of what's outside the curriculum.

"You get to know about the place they come from, about their home and what it is like over there," said Erika Trabanjo, 16.

But there are downsides to having teachers from abroad in the classrooms, the students said. Some find it annoying that the foreigners - whose job is to teach - are sometimes amazed and even angry with students who don't know something about their country or the English language.

"Sometimes, you can't discuss current events because most of them don't know what's going on in the country," said Urbina.

Students also find it frustrating to have to adapt every year to each new teacher's unique methods of teaching and evaluating.

"Once you get used to one teacher and you have learned how to treat him, he goes away and another one comes to replace him," said Cindy Sorto, a junior at the school.

Adapting the lessons

For any teachers, but for-



Oscar Ramirez / The Tattoo

Teachers Amy Pennock, Lushanya Echeverria and Stephen Cobb.

eign ones especially, adapting or integrating El Salvador's culture into the lessons is key in the classroom.

"Relating your teaching to the local culture is important," said Jenner. "For instance, for me as a biologist, it's important that if I am doing food chains, that I use local food, animals, and local plants. For someone who is teaching economics, they might want to bring the local economy of the country and things like that."

Though resources might be limited, it hasn't stopped teachers from abroad from being creative and teaching through more interactive means - such as singing - or drawing outside attention to El Salvador's academics.

Outside the classroom

Some teachers become so fascinated by the country and its people that they decide to build a new life here.

"Ever since I was in Vietnam, I always knew I was going to live outside the United States," said Cobb, explaining why he chose to settle in El Salvador for good. "The people

here are so nice. I think I have found my place. I'm planning to stay here forever."

Cobb isn't the only foreign teacher who's developed powerful reasons to stay.

"Being a teacher in a foreign country for sure affects my life, because it's being here away from Britain, my family and friends," said Jenner.

"Of course, the other side of it is that I have built a new personal life here," said Jenner. "My wife is from El Salvador."

Since most foreign teachers are passionate travelers, they spend their leisure time exploring the six small Central American nations. Foreigners from large countries find it a short distance from one to another.

"I traveled to some popular backpacker locations and met very interesting travelers, most of which were travelling from Mexico to Panama," said Mavuli.

Travel gives teachers a sense of adventure. "I have always enjoyed freedom, and living in a foreign country provides it like no other experience has," Mavuli said.

Since El Salvador adopted the U.S. dollar as its own currency in 2001, teachers find it easier to live in the country and of course, to have a more decent paycheck.

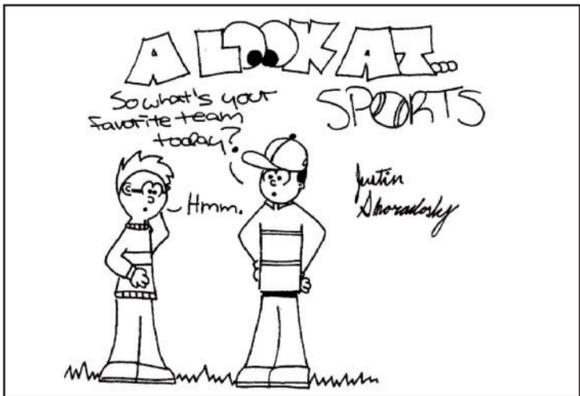
"One of the nice things about teaching in foreign country is that they pay a lot better," said Jenner. "I virtually earn the same salary I would earn in Britain, which of course in El Salvador is very high. I live a nice lifestyle here. Generally, international teachers are well paid."

Teachers also meet many people from different countries that come to explore El Salvador. While El Salvador is not the number one tourist spot in Central America, it has welcomed people from all over the globe, providing a sort of a melting pot for all cultures to socialize.

Foreign teachers face many difficulties while living in a place that is strange to their customs. Being away from their family and not being able to do the everyday things they normally would is the hardest thing to overcome, they said, but the experience of teaching in a foreign country is worth it.

"Perhaps to have an open mind is the word of advice I would give to teachers that are planning to adventure themselves and teach in a foreign country," said Mavuli. "To try to enjoy what the country has to offer and not to look for home-like familiarities when abroad. It is not going to be like your country, so accept that and move on."

"This was a mistake I saw many travellers and teachers make," Mavuli continued, "and they did not enjoy their experiences nearly as much as those who chose to look beyond the garbage on the street, old buses, and oppressive heat to see, feel, and digest the wonderful country they were in."



Justin Skaradosky / The Tattoo

Sleepwriting

By **STEFAN KOSKI**
The Tattoo

During senior year it seems like a great to-do list forms that includes all the step-by-step procedures we need to complete in order to get our diploma, get into college, and not be total failures in life.

Piles of homework from AP classes, college applications and essays, sports, and long work hours - most often from grueling minimum wage jobs - are just a few items on the list that seems to grow by the day.

Students today are fairly good about prioritizing what must be done, though. They type their essays before they're due, they punch-in and punch-out of work in a timely fashion, and everything else is somehow taken care of with sanity relatively intact.

But there's one item at the very bottom of the to-do list that always seems to get short-changed in the name of modern student efficiency: sleep.

Sleep is almost an afterthought, something that has no deadline and can therefore be pushed off until it more conveniently fits into our schedule.

The acceptable amount of sleep dwindles in proportion to the workload, from 10 hours to seven, seven to five, and the less fortunate learn to cope with even smaller quotas of rest. The 21st century student rationalizes exhaustion as the

price to pay for accomplishing the number three goal: not being a total failure in life. It's almost as if the sentiment is, "If I manage to finish all my projects, papers, homework (ad infinitum), I might even get to sleep tonight!"

senior journal

No one objects to this growing trend. Parents allow it, students embrace it, and teachers become disgusted with anyone who uses "being tired" as an excuse for not doing work. Existing in a near-constant state of fatigue is now considered the norm.

I myself have fallen into this trap. The amount of work simply exceeds the available time each day.

I've since started to improve when it comes to sleeping. I take one or two-hour power naps each night before getting up to work again for the rest of the evening. I've slept through my study halls regularly, and some classes have become designated sleep periods.

With all my work not being finished until late at night or sometimes very early in the morning, I've learned to adapt to a world that no longer accepts the concept of sleep as a worthwhile endeavor.

I've even gotten used to the idea of writing newspaper articles at 3:30 a.m.

Remembering Rosa Parks

Inspiration in third grade

By **ZACH BROKENROPE**
The Tattoo

I remember hearing Rosa Parks' name for the first time when I was in third grade.

It was black history month and Mrs. Deines raised an old black and white picture in front of the class.

"Does anyone know who this is?" she asked in her nasally voice.

We all leaned forward in our desks to examine the picture. The woman was African American and not that old, her head was turned slightly, and she was staring out a white window.

I had never seen the woman before, and I guess no one else did since nobody raised a hand.

"This is Rosa Parks," Mrs. Deines said, "and she helped change the world."

I know what you're thinking: there's no way I can remember exact words from a conversation that took place when I was 9. But I do, and it's because ever since then, I've wanted to change the world, too.

I am not an African American, but I am an American. When Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat she symbolized

America, and what it stands for, in the simplest way.

She knew that everyone was created equal, and she knew that she had rights. She exercised them, and would influence the world forever.

I had always wanted to meet Rosa Parks, to shake her hand and say thank you. I wanted to thank her for making the world a better place to live in, and for taking steps to ensure rights for all.

Now that Rosa Parks has died at age 92, I will never get that chance.

However, generations of children after me will someday learn her name and her importance. And because of her, perhaps someday I will have the courage to change the world as well.

Sitting in Rosa Parks' seat on The Bus

By **TARA BROOKE STACEY**
The Tattoo

Sitting in my American history class last Monday, I noticed my teacher passing around a worksheet about civil rights. This was odd to me, considering we were studying the Gold Rush just the week before.

After everyone in the

class received a paper, my teacher explained to us that just that morning, Rosa Parks had died. As I heard her say that, an image popped into my head. It was "The Bus."

"The Bus" made Parks the mother of the civil rights movement. Less than two weeks ago, my history class took a field trip to the Henry

Ford Museum. There, I took a tour of "The Bus" and literally sat in the seat that this courageous woman refused to give up for a white man on that cold December day in 1955.

The tour guide said the museum bought the bus not too long ago on ebay. Of course he gave us a speech about all of Parks' greatest

achievements and awards. Then he mentioned that she was still alive, living in Detroit at the age of 92.

What an awesome woman. She was well known just for doing what any brave African American would have done. Parks, who went to jail for standing up for what she believed in, is a woman I now call my hero.

Her legacy makes the Motor City proud

By **LIANE HARDER**
The Tattoo

As Detroit prepared for Super Bowl XL, an ominous dark cloud appeared over the city. There was a moment of silence, and then everyone burst into action. The city moved faster than ever to spread the news. Rosa Parks, civil rights activist and Detroit legend, was dead.

Broadcasts of football games and news were interrupted, and phones began to ring. Soon, everyone knew.

Parks was 92 years old when she died Monday night, at her Detroit home. She had been having health problems for a while but her death still came as a shock to the community. In a city known for gang violence and a general state of disrepair, Parks was like a ray of light. She gave hope to the community, because she was like an angel watching out for us. She cared about the city of Detroit.

Everyone knows what she did for the country: she refused to give up her seat on the bus, helping to end segregation.

What will the country do for her? Detroit and Montgomery, Ala., as well as some other cities, have placed black ribbons on the first seat of their city buses in honor of Parks. The memorials will stay in place for several days to commemorate her seat on the bus.

In Washington, D.C., she was honored Sunday and today as the first woman to be laid in state in the Capitol Rotunda.

There's also a proposal in Congress to name a federal building in Detroit after her. These are ways for the country to show how much she meant to us all.

Detroiters have many things to say about Parks. They call her a beautiful person, remarkable, and an angel. They ask God to bless her and say she will be remembered as a hero forever.

Last Wednesday afternoon, schools in

Michigan held a moment of silence in honor of Parks. When the announcement was made at 2 p.m., you could have heard someone whisper on the other end of the school. I go to a very big school. Clearly, the respect Detroit had for her will live on.

Hometown pride in Detroit was at an all-time high recently, based on the success of our teams and baseball's All-Star Game. With Parks' death it shot off the charts. Will it ever be this high again? I hope so.

We are proud to live in the city that this great woman called home. We are proud because she didn't see the city the way most people do, as a dark and ruinous place where people get mugged on a daily basis. Detroit was her home, and we are proud to call it our home, too.

We thank Rosa Parks for everything she's done for the country and for the effect she's had on Detroit. But most of all, we thank her for the way she made us feel. We are Detroiters, and proud.

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