

Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message

Sandy, in a New Stage of Her Life

One of my wonderful Dharma friends, Sandy Yamagishi has retired from the University of California San Francisco this year. Soon after that, she took the oath by the US Ambassador to become a Peace Corps volunteer officer. Now she lives in Belize.

To many of you, she must be a stranger, so let me tell you about her a bit more. She is originally from Denver, Colorado and grew up at the Denver Buddhist Temple. Her father was an issei from Fukushima and her mother was a Morikawa and a California native from Sacramento. She was a diligent young Dharma School student. Indeed, she and her all sisters had perfect attendances at Dharma School! ! For her, it was just part of living to go to the temple for all her religious and social functions.

As an adult and parent, she returned to the temple, mainly because of her children and to resolve her years of sorrow over the death of her mother who died prematurely in a freak car accident. Under the guidance of Rev. Oda, she gradually overcame her ordeal steadily and became very active as a Dharma School teacher. Then, she began chairing of their annual Cherry Blossom Festival, and further, she was on the board of directors. Rev. Kujo persuaded her to become the BWA president. She enjoyed the camaraderie and friendship of the Fujinkai ladies there.

After her children went on to college, she made the transition from Denver to San Francisco. She joined the temple. There, the BWA ladies at the San Francisco Buddhist Temple were wonderful in folding her into their group. She chaired, with Mrs. Yoshi Yao, the temple's Ginza Bazaar and then joined the board. Then, she became the temple president! After her retirement from her profession, she took the training session for the Peace Corps and left for Belize. She will live there for two years to help the National Association of Village Councils (includes 193 villages in Belize) to organize and implement the national local governance. She will work at the national government level, district level, and then to the village council level. Working at the macro level down to the micro level will impact the villagers and the grass roots groups who are struggling to create a better life. "We'll see how I do....," says she. Sandy periodically sends us her reports from Belize where availability of an internet is extremely limited. I would like to share some of them from time to time.

Sandy's Belize Report-1:

I never realized how much I take for granted as my lifestyle is completely out of whack with the reality of living in other countries. Here are some realities:

* There is no such thing as hot water piped into the houses - we bathe in cold water- after awhile I got used to showering in cold water. In the villages, most places do not have piped running water. I was fortunate to live with a host family that had piped water and had real bathrooms with toilets. The piped water is sporadic due to political and infrastructure issues - I have to bath with buckets of water from the tank that catches rainwater. Because the water is soft, rinsing the soap off is difficult but I got used to it. It is interesting to wash dishes in the sink to find the water drains directly outside. All other villagers use an outside latrine - after using one during training, I'm so glad I had my own inside bathroom. I'll be learning more while working with the government agency and give you more details as to why this country is so underdeveloped.

* In the villages, church and religion influence their lives heavily. There are church services every night. My host family's dad works hard out in the field during the day then attends service in the evening. My host mom tries and wants to attend services but has a hard time getting away from taking care of the children. Even though the villagers had television and cable, my host dad strongly believed in the evils of television. I bought pirated DVDs in San Ignacio thinking the kids would love to see Disney movies. While the dad was at church service, I ended up sneaking the kids into my house to show the movies on my laptop - Bolt, the Incredibles, and Harry Potter. The dad had an inkling but was gracious enough to ignore it - this was the first exposure to movies for the kids and they loved it.

* The kids have no toys to play - they basically play outside and study and do their homework. My last day there, I watched them bored and fighting with each other. They had some water bottle caps, I took one of them and tried to throw one into a shoe, that turned into a competition which caught their attention. From there, I took an umbrella and showed them how to hit the cap into the shoe like playing golf. They had so much fun learning a new game. I tried to buy new books for a birthday present and only found used book stores - books are hard to find and very expensive. I gave two used books to the girl and found out that birthday gifts are not the norm here. I observed that the books were read and picked up by not only all the kids but the adults too.

* Housing is far from developed - most have zinc roofs, ceilings and walls barely put together - new houses are made of concrete. Some floors are tiled but mostly are exposed wooden planks. My current house in Belmopan has contact paper as floor covering. All the worn and dented pots, pans, dishes, eating utensils, and kitchen stuff that I casually and without thought throw out to buy new ones are basic essentials here.

One of her last reports ended as follows: "I look forward to continuing my Buddhist practice and study here in Belize to keep me anchored." Ganbare Sandy!

Thank you so much Sandy for sharing your great experiences with us to make us awakened to the life of thankfulness and appreciation.

Namu Amida Butsu,
Shaku Shoyo