

Life as a “Celebrity”

A Guest Educator’s Visit to the Philippines

By Sandra Makielski

Balloons, songs, dancing, speeches, and bands! I can’t begin to explain the generosity, the hospitality and the warm feelings I experienced everywhere I went while spending 18 days in the Philippines. As a seventh grade social studies teacher from North Kingstown, I had the privilege of being chosen by Teachers for Global Classrooms, a US Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs program, to participate in their 2015 Educators’ Trip along with 14 other teachers from around the country. With an applicant pool of over 400, amazingly, I was chosen.

Our adventure began 10 months earlier with an intensive online graduate course designed to educate us on the value and importance of global classrooms and global education. Global education is integral to building 21st century skills, and this opportunity is designed to jump start my classroom in that direction. In February, all perspective teachers were flown to Washington, DC for a symposium. Teachers met participants from all over the country and participated in a variety of workshops. With that, on June, 15 teachers boarded the long flight for Manila.

Once in the Philippines, we were paired with a Filipino teacher and incorporated into a school. I had the honor of working in Jose Rizal University, a private, secular school with primary grades through graduate school. My host teacher, Mr. Rufo de Leon, created a comprehensive schedule that included day trips to local sites, classroom

observations, opportunities to teach, and school visits. Upon walking into the school, I was greeted by a large banner with my face and school plastered across the front. I was a celebrity!

Food is a HUGE part of the Filipino culture along with hospitality. Filipinos are very generous so at just about every gathering, whether it be with a principal, a family, or group of teachers, we were offered food. Many of the foods were



A GLOBAL TEACHER: Sandra Makielski, a 7th grade Social Studies teacher, spent 18 days in the Philippines observing teachers and students through a federal government Educational and Cultural Affairs program. Only 14 of 400 teachers were chosen for this trip.



familiar from pork to chicken to delicious fruit. In other cases the foods were exotic: fertilized duck eggs (balut), chicken feet, frogs, and parts of cow I would never have thought to cook. Surprisingly, many of the fruits and vegetables are ones we had never tasted before. And the

most asked question by my seventh grade students: Did I or did I not eat the balut? Yes! I ate balut.

Not wanting to leave my students behind, I brought them along by maintaining a blog and answering the questions they submitted prior to my departure. This is one way I created a global classroom. I shared the lessons I learned and their questions forced me to learn as I looked for the answers from the people I met, the observations I made, and old fashioned research.

All of these new experiences have increased my understanding of a culture that I will share with my seventh grade students. I will share personal stories, pictures and artifacts adding a richness to my classroom that I did not have before. The insight I will have to offer my students should generate an excitement and interest in the Philippines.

At each school, art gallery, and event we were greeted with smiles, banners, balloons and even the key to the city (thank you, Mandaluyong City!). I will miss the polite greetings from students (Good morning, visitors), the assemblies in our honor, and the group photos to document the gathering and my role as "ambassador" from Rhode Island. This special treatment was a constant reminder of how teachers are valued in the Philippines.

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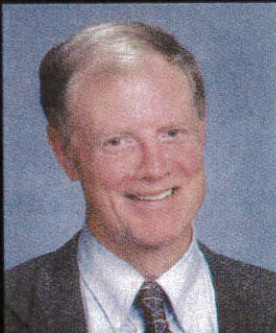
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