Rebeca Ramos: Apprentice Interrupted

Like many of us, Rebeca Ramos Mendez's work and life have been disrupted by COVID-19. Rebeca came to the U.S. in late January as a Visiting Apprentice Teacher at Oakwood Friends School in upstate New York. She had been assisting there with Spanish classes, and sharing stories with students and Friends about life in Bolivia. She was also working on improving her English, and was preparing for other roles at the school.

Oakwood has since closed temporarily because of the virus. Rebeca is sheltering in place in a small apartment on the shuttered campus until she's able to resume her work with schools and visits among Friends. We hope she'll be able to visit Yearly Meetings late in the summer.

For updates about her plans, check our Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/BolivianQuakerEF

The coronavirus news came as Rebeca was making a two-week visit to Sandy Spring Friends School. Thanks to kind Friends, she did get in a quick visit to Washington D.C. before her visit was interrupted.

Rebeca with Janet and Graham Johnson.

Rebeca arrived as a Visiting Apprentice Teacher after completing an English program at the Center of Teaching and Translation of Languages, UMSA, with the help of a scholarship from BQEF. She wrote to her sponsor, “I am very thankful to God for all the blessings I have received. One of these was the scholarship from BQEF that was a big help in finishing my English courses. It helped pay for books, travel, writing materials and my institute fees.”
Rebeca’s family provided emotional support for her studies in Bolivia and now here in the U.S., even though they weren’t able to provide financial support. Her parents Silver and Paulina wrote to her sponsor expressing their appreciation for helping Rebeca finish her English studies.

When she had evening classes, Rebeca took care of her one-year-old niece Camila during the mornings. She deeply enjoyed seeing day by day how Camila grew and developed her abilities. Rebeca tried to teach Camila things she needed to know like how to pray before meals, eat by herself, share with her brother, and brush her teeth. She also taught her a few words of English.

Rebeca was very active in her church in Bolivia, the New Jerusalem Church of the National Church of Friends. In September of 2018, she visited Friends in Popoy, a community in the Alto Bení district. Rebeca was there as a representative of Friends Evangelical Youth Union of Bolivia for a trimestral meeting, and to participate in activities with the youth group and young adults. She used the opportunity to bring bibles and other material for the young people, and says it was a time of great blessing.

She sometimes also attended the Tabernacle Church where her father is currently pastor. She wrote: “Last year the [INELA] church celebrated 100 years of service... I was able to give a message on the part of the [Bolivian Quaker Education] Foundation.

It was a new experience for me because I spoke in front of more than 400 people and some sentences in English. I know that when God is in charge of things you cannot imagine what will happen. For me these months were a great blessing in my life.”
Climate change is real for Friends in Bolivia. For years they and their fellow citizens have been noticing the shrinking glaciers that both the cities and the rural areas rely on for water. Their crops, evolved over millennia for microenvironments on steep mountain slopes, are being forced to change. Scholarship students frequently write of their environmental concerns.

Rut Mamani Poma’s class held an exposition on the Rights of the Environment. They gave an interpretation of the articles of the Law of the Environment. Rut took Article 8, which speaks of the authorities in each department charged with protecting and enforcing compliance with the established laws. She writes “Right now the forests of my country burn in flames, a very sad time. This exposition was important for me because I could display pictures of the green forests before and after the fires, the slow reaction of the authorities, and also raise awareness about caring for the environment.”

Rossio Aspi Cortez wrote that her university, with its focus on agronomy and veterinary studies, organized aid to the animals in the most affected areas. They asked students to help with materials such as gauze, bandages, and medications to help the burned animals. “It seemed a very good initiative for the university to help the animals, because they are also living beings and need our help.”

Several students wrote about the massive fires last summer. Clinton Lucasi Callizaya wrote: “One of the things that worries me most is the fires that are occurring in my country. The event that is happening in Chiquitanía is producing huge environmental damage. It has reached the point where the inhabitants have lost everything. What concerns me most is the care of the planet. Each year that passes we damage it more and more. All countries should sign agreements on the care of the planet. There should be norms that we respect. For example, each university that gives a degree should set as one of their requirements to donate a tree...this way we would be beautifying the place and encouraging the care of the planet where we live.”

Josue Marcelo Quisbert Sillerico wrote that one of his teachers, an architect, had his students work in groups to prepare posters and cans to collect funds for Chiquitanía. Each class meeting he asked how the collection was going. Josue says this showed him that even just one person can cause change.
Our students are sheltering in place with their families during the pandemic. We hope soon they’ll be able to safely gather as above during Scholarships Saturdays, where they receive stipends and guidance.

Your monthly donation helps us support scholarship students all year long. Please make a gift at bqef.org/donate, or contact us for details at office@bqef.org. And thank you!