



STUDENT PROFILE

Building a Bridge Between Haiti and the US

by Stephanie Lawson

It was 4:53 PM on a quiet afternoon near Port-au-Prince, Haiti, when the ground began to heave. As the home he was visiting collapsed around him, the Rev. Arsene Jasmin, head of outreach for the Haitian community in Washington, DC, counted 53 frightening seconds until the world grew still again.

Posted in Washington since 2007 to minister to the three French- and Creole-speaking parishes in our metropolitan area, Jasmin had just returned to Haiti to visit. He was staying in Port-au-Prince but had gone into the hills for a funeral. Miraculously, his life was saved even as so many others perished in the disaster.

Sick at heart, Jasmin returned to the Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Columbia Heights, where he is based. But the earthquake was never far from his mind, and he raised \$7,000 to give to the priests of Port-au-Prince. He said, “In the US, parishioners take care of their priests, but in Haiti, it is the opposite. If we donate to a

priest, that means we can reach other people.” Traveling to Haiti in March, he presented donations to one bishop and 23 priests.

Given the tragedy that has befallen his country, Jasmin believes his place is still there, but both archdioceses want him to stay in Washington another three years. He feels he is learning much about American culture that he wants to apply to Haiti upon his return, and that it is important to perfect his English. He points out that many Haitian immigrants speak better English than French or Creole, and their children are native English speakers. Also, without better English he cannot live successfully in this country, or understand this society.

Jasmin started at LETC last fall. He had earlier taken classes at another ESL school but felt it didn’t suit him. When he started in the 3B daytime classes, he said, “I made more progress here. The teachers explain better and expect students to participate in the class.” He also feels his

teachers are “excellent” and the textbook is effective.

Originally, he said, “I thought I could be fluent in three years. I was dreaming!” Because of his many parish duties, he doesn’t use English every day, so his improvement is slower, but he tries to read the newspaper, books and the Bible in English as much as possible. Also, he celebrates a daily 30-minute English mass for the greater community.

Regarding his life in America, “when we go outside our own country, we get another view of the world. It’s good to have this experience.” He observed, “In America, it seems to me I grow up because I learn how to manage time and my life. Everybody here is responsible. In Haiti, it seems at age 50 or 80, we are still dependent. Here people become adults.”

He praised American values, saying, “In my country, we say Americans are a moral people. I think Americans are compassionate, friendly, and honest. I’d like to bring these ideas to Haiti.”

kinds of services that, frankly, I used to accept without a second thought about who was providing them.

Not any more. That young busboy, the one with the twinkle in his eye, could be my old student Byron, who worked three jobs and had saved enough to buy his parents twenty-five cows for their farm in Guatemala. That chambermaid could be Rosa, the chemistry teacher who came here to clean hotel rooms so that her son could go to law school in Bolivia. And either could be one of my own grandparents, all of whom came to this country with no English and little money, but with the faith that in this country, anything was possible. I’ve come to feel that I’m a link in a chain that connects my grandparents, and those who came before them, with my students—and with their children and grandchildren.

So I guess you could say I don’t get paid to teach English. But then again, you could say that I get paid very, very well.



Who We Are

Our mission is to provide affordable, high-quality English language instruction and other basic educational programs to foreign-born adults in the Washington, DC metropolitan area through the involvement of volunteer teachers and tutors. Our vision is that all immigrants gain the education and support they need to build a better future for themselves, their families and their community.



Rafael Flores serves hungry students at new cafe. See story on page 3.

Language ETC

2200 California Street, NW
Washington, DC 20008-3902
202-387-2222



What We Do

We offer high quality, affordable classes in English as a Second Language (11 courses, Basic-Advanced), Computer Skills (in Spanish), Spanish Literacy (3 levels), Citizenship and Civics. The following free resources are also available for students: language laboratory, computer and internet access, one-on-one tutoring, and job counseling. We are open seven days a week and offer classes during the day, at night and on weekends.

Schedule

Language ETC is open 7 days a week to accommodate the diverse schedules of our students.

Hours: Monday – Thursday: 9 am – 9 pm
Friday – Sunday: 9 am – 5 pm

Spring 2010 Classes: April 19 – July 1

New Volunteer Training: July 17

Summer Classes: July 19 – August 29

Fall Classes: September 13 – December 5

For further information, call LETC at 202-387-2222.



Improving the lives of immigrants through education

LETC Receives Record Donation From Former Volunteer

It arrived in a plain envelope, with no letter or note attached. The only notation on the check was ‘Merry Christmas’ in the memo line; the amount – \$150,000,” recounted Carolyn Morrissey, LETC Executive Director.

Merry Christmas indeed! Anyone who has followed the budget woes of almost every non-profit institution in the D.C. metropolitan area knows that this incredible donation could not have come at a better time.

The donor, who wishes to remain anonymous, is a former volunteer teacher who saw first-hand what a difference LETC makes in the lives of the adult immigrants who attend English classes here. She said she made the donation because “I know how many lives you change at Language ETC.” The decision to make such a significant contribution was prompted by an email appeal sent out to current and former volunteers outlining an all too common issue facing so many nonprofits in the city –

dwindling resources. In this case, it was the sudden elimination of an expected \$150,000 in DC government funding for LETC, which occurred during the city’s autumn emergency budget cuts. This fact was cited in the email appeal, so the donor decided to step in where the city was unable to, making up the entire shortfall.

“While these are very difficult times for everyone, the economic downturn hits our students particularly hard. They routinely come to class to improve their English language abilities before or after putting in 10-12 hour days at their jobs, and caring for extended families here and in their home countries. This donation keeps our doors open to help our students help themselves,” explained Jennifer Browning, LETC Board Chairman. “Everyone associated with the school is extremely grateful to this individual donor for her extraordinary generosity at such a critical time.”

Volunteer Pay

by Natalie Wexler

On the first day of class they sit before me in a semi-circle, every fiber straining to make sense of my words. Some, the old-timers, I greet warmly: Lena from Ukraine, Delfia from Nicaragua, Eseye from Ethiopia, Sofia from Georgia. Others I look forward to getting to know: Noe from El Salvador, Thaïs from Brazil, Srdan from Serbia, Alejandra from Argentina. They range in age, as always, from their late teens to their sixties. Some have advanced degrees from their native countries, while others barely made it past elementary school. The one thing they have in common is their desire to learn English. And it’s my job to teach it to them.

It’s a job I take no less seriously for the fact that it’s unpaid. I teach three hours a week, and often I’ll spend an hour preparing for every hour I spend teaching. When you know ten people are depending on you every



Students and teacher hard at work.

week, whether or not you’re getting a paycheck for doing your job is beside the point.

Why do I do it? And why do over 200 others like me do it every week here at Language ETC? I can’t speak for all those volunteers, but for me, this class is often the high point of my week. It helps that I simply enjoy teaching. And I love the experience of seeing my own language through

fresh eyes, the eyes of my students. This week, the night before class, I lay awake in bed pondering the difference between “I have been coughing” and “I have coughed,” and happily plotting my explanation.

Beyond that, I get the satisfaction of knowing that I’m having an impact on other people’s lives. A few weeks ago after class I ran into a young woman I’d taught for several sessions, starting in a beginner’s class, and then lost track of. When I first met her, she’d barely been able to put an English sentence together, and she

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Letter from the LETC Board Chair

As this newsletter goes to press, we are enjoying a glorious spring after a particularly arduous winter. At LETC we have a renewed sense of commitment to our mission, thanks to the dedication of our students, volunteers, and staff. We've recently welcomed a new Program Director, a new Board Member, and seen record growth among volunteers and continued growth in our students. Thanks to the amazing generosity of a former volunteer teacher who donated \$150,000 (see story on page 1.), we have regained a financial foothold that has been bolstered by the continuing support of many other individual donors as well. We thank you all!

Individual donations alone, however, are not enough to provide the resources necessary to meet our current and growing needs. The foundations that have supported our work (listed on p. 4.) continue to be key to our future. We are also looking for new sources of support from corporations and other foundations. We offer corporate supporters a unique opportunity for community involvement and rewarding volunteer opportunities for their staffs. If you are affiliated with or aware of a potential corporate partner or foundation, please let us know.

In order to spread the word about LETC and to raise funds for the future, we are looking forward to an especially exciting Evening of Celebration, generously hosted by the French Ambassador at the French



Jennifer Browning

Residence on May 25. Tickets are available for \$100 per person. We would love to see you there!

Also, we are thrilled to welcome our new Program Director, Ann-Lloyd Hufstader, who joined LETC in February and brings 20 years of ESL experience to the position. If you see her, be sure and say hello. She has already become a familiar figure to many volunteers, as she hit the ground running in the middle of the winter term.

We extend a warm welcome to our newest Board member, Stephanie Lawson. Stephanie has been a volunteer teacher at LETC since 2007 and brings a wealth of professional and volunteer experience to the Board.

We had a record number of volunteers since the fall, over 300 strong, so that our over 700 students per term were well provided with a full complement of teachers, tutors and computer lab volunteers. Besides a very successful teacher orientation and various training events, daytime teachers attended a luncheon where volunteers could meet, greet and exchange ideas. Another fun event took place at Toro Mata, in November. (See p. 3.) Thank you to our hosts Jim Nixon and Hector Zarate!

With everyone hard at work, and with your support, we remain as committed as ever to improving the lives of immigrants through education. Thank you.



LETC Welcomes New Program Director: Ann-Lloyd Hufstader

Language ETC is pleased to announce the recent hiring of Ann-Lloyd Hufstader as Program Director. Ms. Hufstader brings over 20 years of

experience teaching ESOL at a variety of locations including Arlington County Public Schools' Education & Employment Program (REEP), Carlos Rosario International Charter School and Lado International College. In addition, Ms. Hufstader has served as Director of Lado International College, and Program Manager of the foreign language program at the Graduate School, USDA.

Ms. Hufstader has a passion for ESOL and for helping ease the transition for immigrants who bring a wealth of resources to our community. In addition to her professional activities, Ms. Hufstader has served as a volunteer at AYUDA and holds a B.A. in literature from George Washington University, with a concentration in Spanish language and literature.

Language ETC

(Language, Education, and Technology Center)

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Toro Mata

Friends of LETC came together on November 19th at Toro Mata, a Peruvian art gallery located in the heart of Adams Morgan, for an evening of wine and cheese, art, music and fun. The fundraising event brought in over \$3000.

Two students, Phuong Tan and Luis Pacheco, spoke eloquently – in English, of course – about how LETC has made a difference in their lives. Kaimana Chee provided guests with lively ukulele music, and Kraft Foods generously donated refreshments. Toro Mata also provided wonderful pisco sours! Many who attended purchased art, jewelry and other handicrafts, just in time for the holidays.

Thank you to all who attended and assisted with this event, and especially to Toro Mata for providing LETC with its charming ambiance and for donating 10% of all sales for the evening.

New Café a Big Hit

The line snakes down the hall, almost out into the larger foyer. No surprise – the aroma of pupusas and tamales is hard to resist. If you prefer, try the pizza or the empanadas, grab a soda, a container of fruit, or some rice pudding or flan. Make sure you check if there's something new – one recent Tuesday, chicken mole was on the menu. Where is this thriving eatery? At LETC – right outside the teachers' lounge, near the vending machines! What used to be a large utility closet is now a bright space with shelves, a microwave oven, a refrigerator, and a large serving window with plenty of room for students to order the delicious food, most of which comes from El Tamarindo Restaurant, in Adams Morgan.

Rafael Flores, Marco Romero and Imelda Serrano are responsible for the

welcoming service. They report that the pupusas – made from corn meal and stuffed with either cheese or meat and cheese – are big sellers, but on any given day, something else might go first – pizza (from Costco), taquitas or empanadas. Most items are a bargain at only \$1 a piece. Sodas are 75 cents.

You will also find a number of new tables and chairs, providing a pleasant area to congregate, socialize and enjoy the food during break time or after class.

Proceeds from the café benefit Our Lady of the Americas Church, where LETC is housed.

The café is a big hit with LETC students. Fidel Rivera-Hernandez, a 3-B student, likes the pupusas the best: "Typical of my country, El Salvador. Just like they taste at home."

Workshops on Workplace Rights

Many of the low income immigrants who attend classes at Language ETC are not aware of their basic rights or where to go for assistance. We have been fortunate to have several groups provide workshops at LETC for our students on vital information about this subject. Staff members from Ayuda, which provides multilingual legal and social services for low-income residents, have provided information about human trafficking and domestic violence. Staff from the DC Language Access Coalition came in to offer materials and information about the rights of DC residents and workers who are limited English proficient (LEP) or non-English proficient (NEP) on obtaining equal access to the most essential government benefits and services. Information provided helps students understand how to access oral and written services in their native language from the DC government. In Spring 2010 we will provide information about workers rights in DC, Maryland and Virginia, to include such topics as wage laws, job safety, and family and medical leave.

Our partnership with these groups provides many of our students with a clearer understanding of their rights and responsibilities, which will help them become more fully integrated into society.

A small contribution goes a long way at Language ETC.

Donate through www.languageetc.org and click on *Network for Good* or use [this form](#). Student tuition is only \$120 for a three month term. Your contribution enables us to offer classes at these low prices and provide scholarships whenever needed.

Enclosed is a donation of \$ _____

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