

Some memories of Muriel Heide

I have a vivid memory of luring Muriel to the Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service in East Harlem in the late 1980's, when she came home from Korea. I knew in my heart that she was the perfect person to teach English as a Second Language to our very needy people, who were so eager to learn, so loving and caring. And I was right! She wanted to stay until she turned 80, but her poor health forced her to miss that goal by a couple of years. Today I told one of her former students, a wonderful Mexican woman who is now truly bilingual, that she had died. Her eyes filled with tears...and she said that she was going to pray to her, because she knows she is with God.

What I remember most about Muriel was certainly her great skill as a teacher, but even more, the way that she embodied a special kind of poverty: always giving the simplest service without any fuss, and never uttering a complaint about the constant inconvenience she had to put up with. You must understand that we never had dependable, much less attractive space for any of our classes and groups—we were always going from pillar to post, borrowing, renting, sharing rooms with other organizations and groups. I think that poor Muriel moved her ESL class at least once if not twice a year! And she never grumbled, she just packed everything up again, trundled it to the next dilapidated place, and resumed her wonderful teaching. One year her companion teacher for the other level was an equally elderly CND Sister, utterly different from Muriel, but cut from the same bolt of cloth when it came to putting up with the impossible. They taught in a large, drafty, leaky gym with only portable dividers between them...and somehow the classes not only learned, they had a wonderful time together!

After Muriel moved to Kenwood, whenever I visited she was eager for news of her students, and happy to look at pictures of them and the other staff. It was only in her last years that her memories faded. She was a true inspiration to me, someone who showed what it meant to be simply and unpretentiously given to the poor.

*Sent by Sr. Heide Johnson*

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