

AMA Update

February 2020



Director Letter

Dear AMAs and AMA Families!

Here we are in the month of February where we take a day out to celebrate love. Things have certainly changed since I was a child when I would walk down to the drugstore to pick out a box of Valentine cards for my classmates and buy a small heart shaped box of Russell Stover's for my Mom with a pretty plastic flower on top! Sadly, over the years, the once simple holiday has been overwhelmed by marketers and a consumer culture. We like to do things "big" in the States! But, as Catholics, there is always a religious underpinning to everything we celebrate and on February 14th it is no different. While we might not pay any mind to the *three* St. Valentines the early church remembered on this day, we can ponder the greatest love story of all time, that of the sacrificial, selfless, and unconditional love of Jesus Christ. This is the love that we as Christians are called to express in our lives for God and neighbor everyday and we have witnessed it during these past five months in the lives of our AMAs at their volunteer sites.

In keeping with the "day of love," I asked some of our AMAs to share with us something they **love** about their ministry, and here is what they had to say:

"One aspect of my life as the resident AMA of Worcester that I love is the time I get to be with my ESL (English Second Language) students. What I thought would be an intimidating group has become dear friends with whom I've spent holidays, dance lessons, cooking lessons, and impromptu field trips. And another thing, I love is carrying groceries for people that come to our food pantry. Sometimes it's just to their car, other times we'll walk together to their apartment. We don't have to speak the same language or share anything in common at all, just an understanding that heavy things are best handled with help from others." -Conner

"I love being in Chaparral to experience and share in the love and solidarity of this community. I love spending time with my middle school students and finding new ways to make them feel loved and important." -Sammy

"I love gaining new skills alongside new friends from different cultures." -Kimmy

"I love how close my community is here. I have been able to have a personal relationship with each person, and I have made life-long friends who I know I will want to stay in touch with when I come back to visit my family in the future!" -Katrina

Jesus speaks to his disciples during the Last Supper (John 15:12-13) and proclaims, "This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." St. Marie Eugenie echoes Jesus' words in the quote above. May our young people continue to be generous with their love and may we be inspired by their example and do likewise!

Happy Valentines Day!

- Sandy

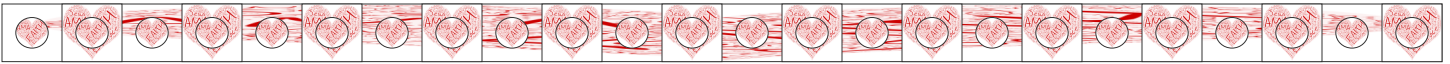
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St. Marie Eugenie Quote of the Month:

"True love is generous. To love is to give of one's self."





Name it, Claim it, Tame it - Serafina BonTempo

I've been in the Philippines for 5 months now. I can't exactly remember what day I landed because it took me 50 hours to get to Manila from Boston and I lost track of time completely. If I remember correctly it was around August 23rd.

In that time I've felt like an object being thrown; like I was sling shot from home in Milford MA across the world and into the Philippines. As any object that is in motion I didn't just stop when I arrived in my service area; I kept moving, bouncing around and around. This left me feeling disoriented and confused; as soon as I felt like I was slowing down or settling in, I hit against something else and it sent me on the move again. I felt like I was in the lurch; constantly confused and unaware of what was happening around me.

I didn't understand the language, the culture and customs. My only friend here was Kathryn and she was 4 hours away in Iloilo. I can only talk to my family and friends from home 2 times a day but really most people are only available one time a day. If I slept in or they didn't pick up it could be days before I talked to them. I felt like I needed to talk to people who understood me and knew me so I could share my struggles, but they didn't understand why things were happening. They would pass judgment on things they've never seen or felt. They would say things that would hurt me. I didn't want all the people I love to have a poor impression of where I was and the people around me.

"When I started relying on my community more things began to piece together."

After I realized people from home weren't the best source of support for understanding and interpreting my new environment I relied on my partner Shaira. Here in the Philippines every AMA is matched with a partner. The idea is to have someone to struggle with, to look out for each other and work together in your mission. I also am blessed to live with a family here. I live on a compound full of the extended family of my hostess. We have dinner together every night. There I'd share my ignorance and they'd clear things up

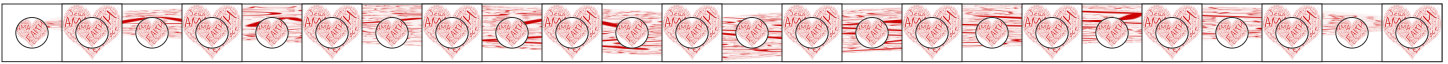
for me. When I started relying on my community more things began to piece together. I started to understand and learn more of the local language and customs and Shaira would teach me Tagalog words. I felt progress.

It wasn't all peaches and cream after that. As I became comfortable sharing my confusion it was perceived as judgment. I was hurting the people in my community as they interpreted my confusion in my stories as judgment, especially my partner. I'd ask why would they say that? Why do they act that way? Why are Filipinos like this? She would retort people in Manila don't act that way.



The hipa hut where Serafina and Shai reside.

She is from Manila. She felt like she had to defend her culture and her people from my attacks. Learning that I was hurting people when I was reaching out for help was hard to digest. It hurt me to know I was hurting them, but I needed to hear that. I needed to learn how to communicate effectively. After a long hard conversation together were Shaira and I both explained our thoughts and feelings we came up with a resolution.



For me when I needed clarification on something, when something in my day challenged me instead of going and immediately telling my partner or community I needed to take the time to write it down and reflect on it myself. I needed to be more careful with selecting my words and with the tone I used in recounting my stories. From this conversation Shaira learned about the stages of cultural immersion. I sent her articles to read so she could better understand what I was going through and recognize the phases of my development.



Serafina and her partner Shai celebrated Christmas Eve on the beach!

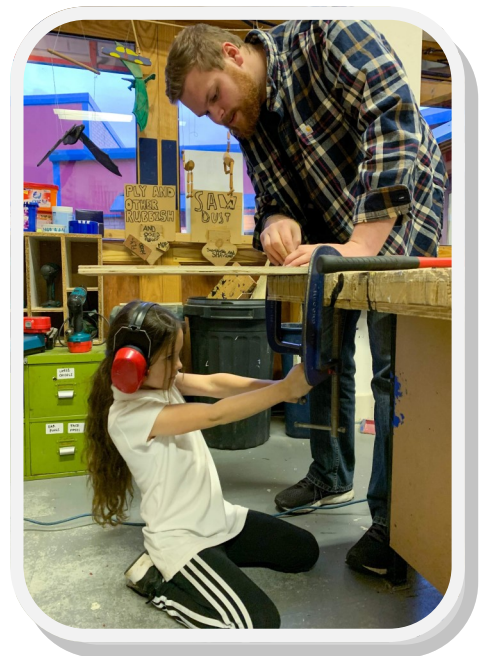
Now I think I'm better at sharing and communicating. I know what to talk to people from home about. I know how to talk to the people in my community so I can gain their knowledge without offending them. I didn't realize before I came here how delicate a balance this is to strike. I'm still working on it everyday. It's not easy but it was a lesson I needed to learn and like any necessary lesson I didn't know I needed it until the problem hit me in the face. I confronted it and am continuing to work on it; like Miss Gamay says, "name it, claim it, tame it".

"I was Tired of Making Boxes." - John Killian's Reflection

In the beginning of our time at Kids Kabin, we did a bit of woodworking as an introduction so that all of the volunteers would have a base amount of skill to work with the kids. I never thought I would enjoy woodworking with kids and creating new and exciting things.

During our first few sessions with the kids, we made boxes with the kids. They were challenging for the kids to assemble on their own and it was a lot of work for one activity. When we were in sessions the kids wanted to make boxes. They always asked for help and there were not many other things the kids wanted to make in woodwork. I was tired of making boxes and I was worried that the rest of the year would only consist of making wooden boxes.

In the fall, we had school sessions that would happen once a week for four weeks. The theme was World War II. I was in charge of woodwork and I was ready to make something new. For those sessions, I decided to make simple wooden toys. In the first week I made



John and child working on a project in the wood shop!

jet planes. They were relatively simple for the kids to make and the prep time was not too long. Next week was cars which was exciting because they could actually roll across the table. The third week was boats. Not my best, but the kids still had fun making them.

All of those toys were ideas from a book that we have at Kids Kabin. I still needed an idea for the last week with the school group. I did a bit of research on toys and vehicles during WWII when I came upon a design for a propeller plane. I spent a few days simplifying the design so the kids would be able to create it in an hour with the school. The kids enjoyed the propeller planes and I got a few new



The finished project!

“I have even started wearing flannel shirts more!”

ideas for woodworking.

I continued getting comfortable in woodwork. My large size made simple tasks like hammering nails and sawing wood much easier than for the kids. This is helpful because it makes them think I am a Master Craftsman when in reality I am not! I felt so comfortable in the woodworking room, that when I was home for Christmas break I felt like I was missing something. These activities that seemed daunting at first became familiar to me in such a short time.

Feeling so comfortable making and creating with my hands, I decided to make ornaments from wood for Christmas presents. I was really proud of how they turned out and people enjoyed them too!

To take a piece of wood or two and carve it into something amazing with a few careful cuts and a whole lot of sandpaper to smooth out the edges is one amazing thing. It can be frustrating when you snap a piece of wood or hit your thumb with a hammer, but after all of the hard work sawing away and drilling screws, the finished product is worth it every time. And it's not just the wood that's being "worked." Throughout this half year I have felt that I have been carefully crafted into more of who I am meant to be.



John brought Sammy and Conner an ornament to our winter break retreat.

I have really connected with woodworking (I have even started wearing flannel shirts more). I love making and creating new things with the kids each and every day, from treasure chests to dog houses, bird houses to space ships. Each one brings joy to the kid that works on it. I cannot wait to see what the rest of the year will bring.

!!!IMPORTANT!!!

Monthly one-on-one check-ins this month! Be sure to schedule with Sandy if you haven't already!

Read January and February readings for group Skype chat—TBD.

Myra off to Villanova on February 5th for a college visit! Go Myra, get us an AMA!

Happy Birthday—Sr. Tere, February 5th, and Sr. Nuala, February 18th!

