Blog
Spirituality

Sister Miriam poses with a Mexican paper flower at the Hope Border Institute's October teach-in she hosted. (Samantha Kominiarek)

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 10th round of bloggers: Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker in Orange, California, and Samantha Kominiarek is an Assumption Mission Associate in Chaparral, New Mexico.*

One of my favorite quotes by Jamie Tworkowski, founder of To Write Love on Her Arms, is: "You'll need coffee shops and sunsets and road trips. Airplanes and passports and new songs and old songs, but people more than anything else. You will need other people and you will need to be that other person to someone else, a living breathing screaming invitation to believe better things."

I have loved this quote since high school. Back then, I loved it most because I enjoyed coffee shops, the sun, music and travel. About a month ago, I rediscovered this quote and appreciated the emphasis on the importance of relationships with other people. We really do need people in our lives who invite us to believe in better things.

Over the past few months, I have had many new experiences that have been challenging for me, such as learning about the heart-wrenching journeys of refugees as they try to seek safety and about the dehumanizing treatment of people in detention centers. Even the classroom discussions my students have as they make connections between their lives and the story about abuse they are currently reading, *A Child Called "It"*, have been trying.

However, in the communities of Chaparral, New Mexico, and El Paso, Texas, I have met many people who are living, breathing, screaming invitations to believe in better things.

Krystal, one of my seventh-grade students, brings me hope. One day during Spanish class, I noticed she was sneakily making origami, or *figuras de papel*, under her table. I asked her to put it away while she was in class but said this could be a fun activity to do together during recess. That afternoon, we made origami boats, cranes and hearts together. Many other students were interested in learning how to make

these, too.

Juanita, right, and I serve a picadillo and rice at Annunciation House in some sunflower gear. (Provided photo)

They inspired me to teach a lesson about the book *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*, which is a story about peace and positivity. We discussed what lessons we can learn from Sadako's optimistic attitude. Then, we made origami cranes, or *grullas*, and hung them above the door to remind us to embrace the positivity Sadako had, even during challenging times. Krystal's openness to learning new things and enthusiasm for life makes me excited to come to school each day.

Juanita, a woman who lives in Chaparral, has made me feel so welcome here. I met Juanita in early October while we were serving dinner at Annunciation House in El Paso, a hospitality program that uses the spirit of service and solidarity to accompany migrants on their journeys by providing them with a place to stay and food to share. One recent afternoon, I was missing my mom and wanted a hug. I texted Juanita and asked if I could stop by her home for a hug.

She texted back: "*Claro que sí*." When I arrived, she gave me the best hug, and we shared a delicious vegetarian feast that included beans, avocado, soup, tortillas, cheese and popsicles.

While at her house, I realized we shared a love of sunflowers, or *girasols*. (In Spanish, *girar* is "to turn," so the Spanish word for sunflower means "to turn toward the sun.") Juanita prepared the dinner for Annunciation House this past week and gifted me a beautiful sunflower apron to wear as we cooked and served together. Her warm, thoughtful love gives me hope.

Marizol, a runner with the running club at the Up & Running store in El Paso, inspires me with her care and motivation. I joined this running club in mid-October, and Marizol was one of the first people who welcomed me here. The group meets every Tuesday to run various routes around the University of Texas at El Paso and nearby neighborhoods and parks.

The running group celebrates the completion of our 10K Nov. 16 at a plaza in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. (Provided photo)

Marizol has introduced me to her friends in the group and has made me feel as though I belong here, even though most of the runners are training for marathons and I am running a few miles for fun.

On Nov. 16, we ran the Run Internacional 10K. This route has a 5K loop around El Paso then crosses over the bridge to Mexico for another 5K around Ciudad Juárez. The race finished at a plaza where runners received medals, water and, most importantly, post-race burritos. Marizol and her friends invited me to spend the morning with them. Her energy and love for her binational culture refuels me.

Sister Miriam, who is here in Chaparral for two months from El Salvador, has the most joyful smile. Her presence brings so much life to this community. I love sitting in the way back of the SUV together when we go to an event with the sisters. We

share stories or look at cute dogs in the cars that pass us. Sister Miriam's heart is full of love and compassion. She embraces all challenges and experiences that come her way, such as learning English here or living in a community in Nicaragua.

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On the morning of our retreat at the end of October, Sister Miriam and I were washing the dishes. I was feeling rather overwhelmed by the struggles I had encountered throughout the week, and I was missing my family and all that was comfortable. Sister Miriam allowed me to share with her as she listened. She reminded me that this is natural. Her authenticity and gentleness made me feel as though I was not alone.

While I will miss her dearly when she leaves for her new community at the beginning of December, I am grateful for the time we got to share and excited for her new community to know and love her.

These are some of the people who have been my living, breathing, screaming invitations to believe in better things. They have brought light and love into my life. I am trying to bring hope to others by being present, giving hugs, smiling more, listening and encouraging others by showing up for them.

Who is someone in your life who is inviting you to believe in better things? How are you inviting people in your life to believe in better things?

The cranes the seventh-graders made hang above the classroom door to remind students to enter and leave the classroom with a positive and peaceful attitude, just

like Sadako. (Samantha Kominiarek)

[Samantha Kominiarek is doing a year of service with the Assumption Mission Associates in Chaparral, New Mexico.]

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.