

Nine of Cups – 45' Liberty Cutter – 7' draft – June 2005

Subject area: ***Paying It Back or Paying It Forward***

Teaching English at Puerto Lucia Yacht Club, Ecuador

After more than a year experiencing Ecuador and sharing the culture of these hospitable people, there seemed no way to repay our new friends and associates for the warmth and friendship they had shown us during our stay at the Puerto Lucia Yacht Club. It came to my attention that many of the marina workers were taking English classes from a local teacher, but he had recently moved to another city and their continuation of English studies became difficult.

After much thought and hesitation, I asked one of the *marineros* whether or not he might be interested in studying English with me and if so, did he think others might be interested as well. I have a teaching certificate and I taught high school English when I first got out of college (100+ years ago), but I had no experience in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) nor was my Spanish all that great. Additionally, I had no textbooks or workbooks so I would be on my own.

I spoke to Galo Ortiz, the manager of Puerto Lucia, told him of my idea and asked for his input. I explained that I would provide lessons *gratis*, but in exchange would like the use of a room at the clubhouse for my lessons. Not only did he agree, he provided a comfortable, well-equipped room with a whiteboard and had all lesson copies made at no cost to my students or me. We agreed on two classes per week, 2 hours each. Signs were hung throughout the marina and over 20 registered for the class. I was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm.

Initially, I spent a significant amount of time preparing an overall plan for what I hoped to accomplish, detailing content of each week's lessons and a platform upon which to build language proficiency. I solicited input from my students as well as any materials they might have had from previous English classes. I made up worksheets for each lesson based on themes for the week, customizing the lesson content and vocabulary for my particular group. For instance, one lesson was about the marina, typical cruiser questions that might be asked, parts of a boat, commonly used tools, etc. We talked casually of cultural differences between the U.S. and Ecuador as part of the course of study, explained local customs and generally enjoyed each other's company while we learned.

Though the workload was more than I anticipated (kind of like working on a boat project), teaching motivated adults was truly a pleasure. They worked hard, practiced and completed assignments with gusto. I cannot adequately express the satisfaction of listening to English chatter in the boatyard and hearing them correct each other's sentences.

The biggest problem I encountered was the disparate levels of expertise within the group. If I spent too long on the basics, I bored the advanced group. If I moved ahead too quickly, I lost the beginners. I finally aimed at the middle. In the future, I would offer more than one class level and solicit the help of other cruisers to share the teaching responsibilities. Completing the class and getting ready to depart was an emotional event. However, our friends, Sarah and Bill on *Cheval*, who were returning from the U.S. were enthused about continuing English lessons.

Anyone interested should consider perusing the Internet for available texts on TEFL as well as workbooks. A good bilingual dictionary with a grammar section in both English and Spanish was invaluable to me. But don't be put off by the grammar stuff, in the end, it's all about communication.

We cruisers are always looking for special ways to contribute to the local communities we visit, intent on not only leaving a clean wake, but a lasting, positive impression with our host countries. Teaching English to a receptive audience might be something to consider.

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