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I am currently a program director with International Seminar Design, Inc. I design and direct travel programs abroad for patrons of museums, alumni, etc.

I was connected to Behrhorst through my father, Bill Kaspar. In the winter/spring of 2000, I was seeking out a summer work opportunity in Latin America. I don't recall how the topic came up, but he recommended that I get in touch with Pat Krause, who was working on an English-language project with their scholarship students. I ended up going to Comalapa for 6 weeks to teach English, living with the Otzín family.

The image that stands out most in my mind is a photograph that sits on my bookshelf; it's an enlarged photo of my afternoon class and myself on our last day of class. It's a beautiful photo, and I look at it often. We're all lined up on the classroom wall with wide smiles and twinkling eyes. We took over 24 photos on that last day – they loved the camera and posing. It reminds me so much of the beauty and warmth of the girls I worked with – they all left quite an impression on me. I was simply enchanted by their vitality and charm. Some of them took me home to meet their parents and I loved that. I was not expecting to be able to relate to them as much as I did.

There was a young woman who was particularly feisty. She was incredibly bright, and not afraid to show it, but in a feisty kind of way. She always tried to get out of doing exercises, or sneakily pointed out my faults. She and her brother came to class and they always made me giggle (when I wasn't stewing over their craftiness)....

A story that always sticks out in my mind was when I interviewed the girls about their lives, favorite foods, favorite subject in school, etc during my first week in Comalapa. On the "favorite food" question, I continually received the response "pollo campero." I thought that was so sweet – country chicken – some popular recipe that their mothers made. Two weeks later, I took a trip to Antigua and was introduced to "Pollo Campero" – a Guatemalan fast food chain akin to KFC. I felt so stupid (but how could I have known), but I also felt a sense of awe that these teens that I

thought were so shielded from city life were actually rather savvy when it came to the things that teens around the world know about. I ate Pollo Campero, and I could see why they liked it so much (although the anti-fast food nut in me was enraged that fast food is taking over the world). Another very vivid moment was visiting Mirian at the Behrhorst Foundation when she had given birth to Julio César. My father had worked on the building, and it really meant something to me to see it in use and to see it with my own eyes.

I cannot underscore the significance of the Behrhorst experience for me personally. For the first time in my life, I was hailing buses on the side of the road in a foreign country, planning travel throughout Guatemala, planning my own lessons. It was the biggest step into adulthood that I had yet had (I was only 20 years old). It was hugely eye opening. I remember sitting around the table with my family one night when their twenty-something son, Fausto, came home from law school for a couple of nights. When he asked me my major, and I said “international development”, he asked me to summarize my views on international development, and what Guatemala could do better. I got absolutely red in the face, and realized that I couldn’t truly explain the complex ideas I had in Spanish. I ended up changing my major to Intercultural Communication, though. The idea of facilitating dialogue between cultures appealed to me more than USAID.

I was also truly impressed by the pressures and obligations on these girls. Some girls had to miss classes to take care of families, work, etc...something I had never contemplated at that age. Finally, my sense of problem solving and adventure was truly honed. I remember getting stranded in a little town and talking my way into a ride on a bus. I was so timid as a child, and there I was striking up conversations while sandwiched with strangers on a chicken bus.

As far as the influence it has had on me today, I cannot think of a single part of my life that hasn’t been affected. I now design and operate study tours for art museums and alumni associations. I am planning travel programs, operating tours, solving problems, and dealing with buses breaking down in rural Brazil. It’s all directly related to that first experience. I also developed a true appreciation for Maya textiles during my time there. I continue to collect Maya and Inca textiles, and have expanded to Indian. On a very personal note, the summer I spent in Comalapa was also a lonely time, and it caused me to do a lot of thinking about myself and my relationships with others.

On a recent tour to Chile and Argentina with Vassar College, I was talking to one of my travelers about Guatemala. She is down there often with a non-profit. She asked me what organization I had worked with and she nearly fell off her chair when I mentioned Mayaworks. Her friends in California frequently host Mayaworks sales in the San Francisco Bay area.