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Janet Gold, Professor of Spanish, COLA, travels to Honduras

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Janet Gold

Professor of Spanish - College of Liberal Arts

Professor Gold traveled to Santa Lucía, Honduras, in June to learn about some of the non-governmental organizations which are working there to help local communities survive.

In the spring of 2010 I taught a new course I developed for the Spanish Program of the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures on the topic of: "Cultural Survival: Indigenous and Rural Communities of Central America." One of the major themes that we explore is the work of non-government organizations (NGOs) that support the survival of these communities through such projects as sustainable agriculture, the revival of traditional handicrafts and the preservation of indigenous languages. I have been encouraged to continue to expand my knowledge of this subject by the enthusiastic response of my students. Many of them are desirous of traveling, studying and working in other countries and are eager to explore opportunities to engage in travel with a purpose.

To gain more first-hand knowledge of the workings of NGOs in Honduras, I spent ten days in Santa Lucía, a village in the mountains outside of Tegucigalpa, where Aldea Global (Global Village) has worked with the local community to establish a cultural center. Its official name is the Center for Art, Education and Culture (Centro de Arte, Educación y Cultura), but everyone refers to it as "la biblioteca" (the library), because it has become a busy work place for the local school children. The municipality of Santa Lucía consists of the historic village center and several small hamlets or aldeas in the surrounding hills. In the center, where the school and cultural center are located, the steep, winding streets are paved with stones, making it easier to get around on foot than by car.

Located in an area of Honduras originally settled by the Lenca people, where the discovery of mineral wealth, particularly gold and silver, attracted first Spanish then British, German, Canadian and United States investors and miners, Santa Lucía has a rich and colorful past. Global Village is currently supporting a local history project that involves the recovery of historical documents and the restoration of old photographs as well as extensive interviews with the towns elders. The goal is to produce a book that not only documents the village's past, but celebrates the oral tradition and helps preserve precious historical memories.



Janet Gold (r.) with Rosalinda Hernandez, an employee of the NGO "Global Village"



Town elder, Cecilia Soto, shared fascinating stories about life in Santa Lucia in the early decades of the 20th century

During my stay in Santa Lucía I worked with Rebeca Becerra, an anthropologist and historian from Tegucigalpa who has been unearthing Colonial documents in the National Archives and interviewing local residents. Together we explored abandoned mines, visited local history aficionados and interviewed some of Santa Lucía's oldest residents. I spent time at la biblioteca talking with students working on homework or research projects. I interviewed Chet Thomas, the founder and director of Global Village and gained insights into the workings of non-profit volunteer organizations in developing countries. I also spent time with Honduran employees of Global Village to get an idea of what development work looks like from their perspective.

My stay in Santa Lucía has evolved into a new and exciting project for me. Global Village has invited me to collaborate in their local history project so, using the materials that Rebeca Becerra is accumulating, I have started writing a history of Santa Lucía for children. This will not replace their book project but will be a local history written especially for a young audience. I am grateful to the Center for International Education and the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs for Faculty Development for grants that made this trip possible.



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