



The Conversation

June 2021



This Just In...

We hope all of our supporters and partners are enjoying the summer. At Welcoming the Stranger, we're laying the groundwork for our fall term during these summer months and we're excited to share that we anticipate offering in-person and virtual classes this fall. Confirmation and full details will be forthcoming. Right now, we're reaching out to sites and volunteers. With their feedback, we look forward to offering a variety of online and in-person programs to best meet the needs of our students and support our volunteers. Our students and teachers look forward to meeting face-to-face once again and fostering the connections and skills that change immigrants' lives.

News from the WTS Office



We're very pleased to welcome Susan Daily to WTS as our Development Associate. Susan brings broad fundraising experience to this position and she's ready to help manage our process for researching, applying for, and reporting on grants, along with other responsibilities. Most recently Susan served as Director of Development for College Settlement, a Montgomery County nonprofit.

WTS is proud to celebrate Acting Director Patricia Lorenz's new status as an American citizen. Patricia completed a citizenship preparation course through WTS, passed her naturalization exam, and was sworn in as an American citizen at a ceremony in Philadelphia on April 2nd.

Welcome Susan and congratulations Patricia!



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WTS Volunteer Spotlight: Inez Recupido



Inez Recupido taught high school English for 40 years. Though it's been a decade since she stood in front of a classroom of teens, Inez still teaches every week, finding joy and purpose as she helps adult immigrants and refugees learn English through Welcoming the Stranger.

"My fulfillment comes from making a connection and feeling like they're learning," she says, "I enjoy my students so much."

Inez first discovered Welcoming the Stranger when she was newly retired and looking for volunteer opportunities that were a good fit for her professional experience. She started out by assisting in a class led by WTS founder Sturgis Poorman. A decade later, Inez is a dedicated ESL teacher

leading two classes. She has even mastered the mechanics of virtual instruction to keep her classes going through the pandemic, despite some initial reluctance.

"When September [2020] came and everyone was shouldering the work, I knew it wasn't right to do nothing," she recalls. "I was scared to death of Zoom. But after three or four training sessions, [teaching virtually] became second nature. I'd forgotten how good it feels to learn something new."

Today, Inez embraces Zoom sessions with enthusiasm and even feels that online classes have some advantages over in-person learning, citing more consistent student attendance and the helpful use of an online textbook.

Working primarily with intermediate and advanced English learners, Inez's students are mostly college graduates in their home countries and several are planning on pursuing Masters' degrees here in the U.S. after they gain more proficiency in English. Weekly WTS classes help these immigrants fine-tune their mastery of English as they expand their vocabulary and perfect pronouns, tenses, and pronunciation.

Given her teaching background, Inez loves to incorporate literature and writing into her classes. For example, one class read and discussed Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" and completed writing exercises about the novel.

"We do a lot of writing to help students polish their English skills," Inez shares, explaining that writing out their thoughts in English really challenges students to hone their grammatical skills, use new vocabulary and more descriptive words, and write sentences that are varied and intelligent. "Learning to write helps students learn how to sound like a native English speaker," she says. "They realize the respect a person gets when they're completely understood."

The discussion of ideas and prominent topics also plays an important role in Inez's instructional approach.

"My students love to have conversations and debates with each other," she says, noting that many immigrants lack the opportunities to exchange viewpoints, especially in English. On a recent evening, her intermediate class was planning to discuss the First Amendment and explore its relevance to current events.

Inez emphasizes that while her career has helped her, a teaching background isn't essential for WTS volunteers. From the beginning of her time with WTS, Inez says, "I'm awed by how lovely people are and how easily these talented people connect with students, even beginning students who struggle with English."



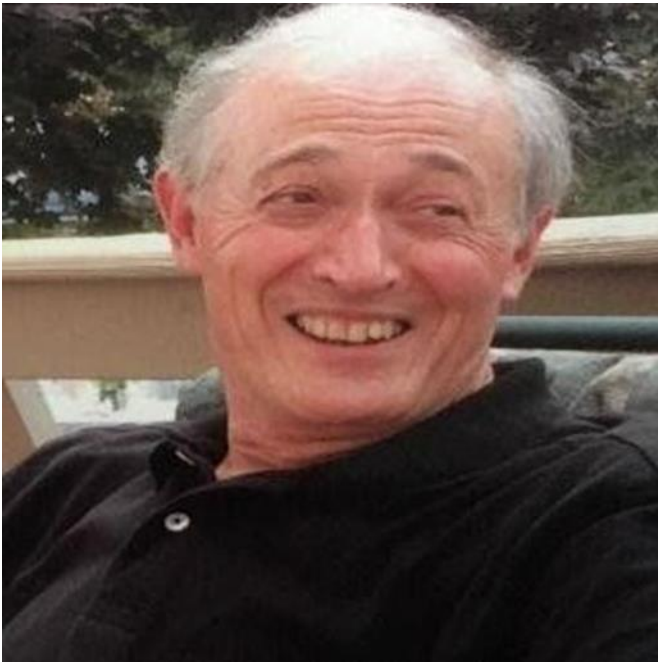
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In fact, in Inez's view, the most important qualities for volunteer ESL teachers to have are patience, curiosity, and respect for other cultures, as well as a good sense of humor. "So many things can go wrong, and everyone makes mistakes," she points out, noting that not taking herself too seriously seems to help students feel comfortable, eager to try, and unashamed of mistakes.

"Inez gives her students top-notch instruction and so much more -- the warmth of acceptance and a consistent means to build their confidence," says WTS Board President Bill Kennedy. "Inez and all of our wonderful volunteer teachers are the heart and soul of Welcoming the Stranger. We're deeply grateful for their work."

Introducing the Rev. S. Sturgis Poorman, Jr. Fund: Your Donation This Month Matched 2:1



Two decades ago, Welcoming the Stranger began as the idea of one man, a Presbyterian minister named Sturgis Poorman, Jr., who saw the need for free English classes in the immigrant community.

This spring, WTS was the recipient of a generous financial gift from Sturgis Poorman's cousin, Julie Jensen Bryan, and her husband, Robert Bryan. Julie and Robert's gift will establish a fund that honors Sturgis' memory and ensures the long-term sustainability of his vision. And, in case you missed it, Julie and Robert Bryan are matching all donations 2-to-1 until June 30, 2021.

This means your donation made in the next few days will be tripled! For more information, visit [Rev. S. Sturgis Poorman, Jr. Fund](#)

"I remember when Sturgis first told me about his idea in 1999. It was a perfect fit for who he was – friendly, loving and committed to making our country a more welcoming place for families who've come here looking for a better life," Julie Jensen Bryan recalls. "Sturgis had lived overseas and knew how it felt to be welcomed in a new country and how daunting a language barrier can be. I have the deepest affection for Sturgis and miss him dearly, so it is my and Robert's honor to help ensure ESL classes will continue for years to come with the best expertise."

Meet Board Member Lois Heist

Lois Heist is a retired educator who has served Welcoming the Stranger as a teacher and a board member since 2015. She's also currently the chairperson for WTS' Strategic Planning Committee.

Lois is known for her lifelong commitment to supporting immigrants and refugees.



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She helped resettle Vietnamese refugees in Baltimore, MD and in Lower Bucks County, and has assisted in the local resettlement of refugees from Syria. “I have long felt a faith-inspired calling to help immigrants and refugees by sharing my experience in teaching languages and by helping them adjust to our very complicated culture,” she shares.

During her career, Lois taught French, Italian, English as a Second Language, and U.S. History, worked in school administration, and served as an adjunct instructor at Temple, Penn State~Great Valley, and Immaculata Universities. She served five years on the Council Rock School Board, including one year as Board President, and served

on the Strategic Planning Committees of the Bucks County Intermediate Unit, the Pennsbury School District, and the Tredyffrin-Easttown School District.

Lois is the recipient of several awards including Outstanding Service to Public Education in Bucks County, Professeur du Lauréat from the American Association of Teachers of French, and a Lauréat de la Plume d’Or de l’Académie Française.

Lois holds a Bachelor’s Degree in French and Italian, a Masters Degree in History and Government and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership. She serves on other local boards including the Alliance Française de Doylestown et Bucks County and the Bucks County Commission for New Americans.

To make a donation, please click below. Thank you!

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