

UNCOMMON GOOD

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Early Trauma Becomes Inspiration for Healer

The Rose Hills Foundation and S. Mark Taper Foundation Sponsor the Work of an Extraordinary Dentist for the Poor

“Why didn’t you bring your daughter here earlier?!” the angry dentist yelled at the stricken mother. “She has large cavities on her permanent teeth and needs three root canals!” Marina’s mother had been raised in a little village where there was no knowledge about dental hygiene and people only went to the dentist if a tooth hurt. So seven-year-old Marina had to undergo a number of tooth extractions and root canals, all without anesthesia, because that was not available where they lived. “The memory of that pain is permanently imbedded in my head,” she says.

Dr. Marina Markova grew up in Montana, but not the one you are thinking of. Her birth town was Montana, Bulgaria. During the communist years, there had been a large garment factory there that employed most of the residents. At the time of her birth, however, there were a few rich people and everyone else was poor and getting about on foot, eking out a living by running a tiny store, or doing odd jobs. Opportunities were extremely limited. Marina’s mother had once had dreams of becoming a doctor, but there was no way to realize such a dream in their circumstances. The family had an uncle who had fled the country during the communist era and had come to the U.S. He had gotten a job in construction and every now and then an intriguing package full of gifts would arrive in the mail courtesy of the lucky uncle.

Then one day everything changed in an instant. Immigration from Bulgaria to the U.S. was *[continued on page 6]*



Dr. Marina Markova with a young patient.

Parktree Community Health Center



Uncommon Good student Madeleine with her mentor, Makella Brems, celebrating Halloween.

Photo by Duran Family

The Joy of Mentoring

By Makella Brems

When Madeleine laughs, she reveals a mouthful of shiny metal fillings that cap more of her molars than not. This doesn’t stop her from downing sugar—I mean straight sugar. “Look what I broooooought,” she sings as she pulls out a handful of brown packets of raw sugar from her backpack. She rips them open and takes them like shots. Our weekly lessons don’t begin until Madeleine has had her fix of sugar. If it’s not with sugar packets then it’s in the form of a Snickers Bar melting between her little fingers or saliva-inducing Sour Patch Kids candies. Even then, our lessons may not begin for quite a while if Madeleine can help it.

I have been meeting with Madeleine every Thursday after school for two years, starting when she was nine years old. After going through my *[continued on page 4]*

Help Available for Doctors for the Poor

Applications are now being accepted for L.A. Care’s Elevating the Safety Net Physician Loan Repayment Program. The program provides educational loan repayment assistance for primary care doctors who are new to caring for the MediCal eligible population of Los Angeles County. If you are a primary care physician who has been working six months or less in LA County serving a primarily poor population, or are about to accept a job in this area, you can find more information and the application for the program at uncommongood.org/med/mednews/



Dr. Yulsi Montero, an LA Care grant recipient, with a patient at the Martin Luther King Community Medical Group in Compton.

Photo by Martin Luther King Community Medical Group

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Photo by Carlos Carrillo



Uncommon Good students at the Woodcraft Rangers Outdoor Science Camp.



Uncommon Good student participating in the Inland Valley Repertoire Theater summer camp.

Photo by Donna Marie Minano

Thank You, Friends!

Uncommon Good offers its most grateful thanks to the following foundations, businesses and organizations which have made generous recent grants to support its education, medical and urban farming programs that serve close to 1,000 low-income students and families each year and that support 49 doctors, dentists, pharmacists and optometrists who serve 144,366 low-income patients each year:



Uncommon Good's student band in the Claremont 4th of July parade.

Photo by Carlos Carrillo



Dr. Grace Dasovich, an Uncommon Good MED recipient.

Photo by Kids and Teens Medical Group

- Beach Point Capital
- California Community Foundation
- Children's Fund
- Claremont Presbyterian Church
- DecisionQuest
- Draper Family Foundation
- Economy Shop
- Edison International
- Educational Attainment Services
- Edward A and Ai O Shay Foundation
- Fay Family Charitable Fund
- General Motors
- Inland Empire United Way
- Kaiser Foundation Hospitals, Ontario
- LA Care Health Plan
- Manatt, Phelps & Phillips
- Mose J and Sylvia Dilman Firestone Trust
- MUFG Union Bank Foundation
- Oportun
- QueensCare
- Ralph M Parsons Foundation
- Robert C. Fraser Fund of the California Community Foundation
- Rosemont Mortgage
- Samech Aleph Lamed Inc
- S Mark Taper Foundation
- The California Wellness Foundation
- The Rose Hills Foundation
- University Club of Claremont
- TRUECar
- US Bank Foundation
- USDA
- Weingart Foundation
- Winston & Strawn

What Do We Do?

1. Connect to College/CAUSA (CCC): Nearly 1,000 low-income students and their parents are served through CCC. Starting in the 4th grade, students are given one-to-one mentoring, tutoring, educational enrichment, leadership training, community service opportunities, and extensive help preparing for and applying to college. Parents are provided with social services, educational opportunities, and leadership training. 100% of Uncommon Good students go to college, even as 41.5% of their socio-economic peers are dropping out of high school. The CAUSA component of the program is an urban farm enterprise that produces organically grown fruits and vegetables for CCC families and the community at large. It also provides real world learning opportunities for CCC students and parents in the areas of ecology, health, and running a small business.

2. Medicine for the Economically Disadvantaged (MED): This program helps idealistic doctors, dentists, pharmacists and optometrists repay their sky-high educational loans, some nearly \$800,000, so they can accept the lowest paying jobs in the medical profession, those serving the poor in community clinics throughout the southland. MED also has a health career pipeline through which Uncommon Good students are introduced to careers in medicine and helped to prepare for and to apply to medical school.

3. Whole Earth Building (WEB): This is Uncommon Good's office, a beautiful first-of-its-kind green building that was constructed by hand using little more than on-site earth, by Uncommon Good staff, children, parents, and hundreds of community members. It continues to receive visitors from every continent (except Antarctica!) who come to learn how to create buildings that keep people safe from natural disasters and do not harm the earth.

Photo by Nancy Mintie



Uncommon Good farmer, Miguel Bonilla.

Photo by Elizabeth Preciado



Uncommon Good students at the Weekly Writing Workshop book launch party.



Uncommon Good MED recipient Dr. Allison Casciato with a young patient.

Photo by Eisner Health

Music Teacher Missionary Gives Great Gift

Eloise Dale is 94-years-old and so tiny she'd be turned away from those "You Must Be This Tall To Ride" carnival attractions. But she also could be the original inspiration for the adage that the best things come in small packages.

Eloise grew up in Kansas and married her husband, Ken, who was a pastor in the Lutheran Church of America. At the conclusion of World War II, the church had a saying about Japan, which was "Send missionaries, not guns." So the young couple was dispatched to that country in 1951 despite the fact that they did not speak a word of the language, as was the custom in those days. Once there, they were sent to language classes for just one year, kind of a tough love linguistics course. Yet it was a good match. Eloise and Ken fell in love with the Japanese people and stayed there nearly half a century until their retirement in 1999. They witnessed firsthand that nation's extraordinary postwar recovery, and historic milestones such as the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the first Olympics ever held in Asia.

While Ken pastored, Eloise cared for their two boys and taught piano and organ. The two of them also saw a real need in post atomic bomb Japan for mental health care. Mental health issues were a subject of shame in the culture and families tried to deal with conditions such as depression by themselves and in secret. No one wanted to discuss the subject despite the fact that many people were suffering from mental and emotional trauma from the bombing and other wartime devastation. So the Dales decided to break the ice around the subject by holding public lectures by experts. Because there weren't many Christians in Japan, they held the talks in secular or ecumenical settings so that folks would feel comfortable attending. Their strategy worked. People started coming to the talks and becoming educated about mental health. Then Eloise and Ken began to hold classes and offer counseling which became popular since the stigma of emotional and mental suffering had been removed.

Once the Dales retired, they moved to Claremont's Pilgrim Place, a retirement community for missionaries and social justice advocates. Eloise gave concerts on the United Church of Christ's grand Glatter Gotz/Rosales organ, which is the same (minus one keyboard) as the famed organ at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, the home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. I wish I had known her in those years. The sight of the diminutive Eloise playing all of those keyboards, stops, and pedals on that giant magnificent instrument would have been something to behold!

But in addition to music making, money management turned out to be one of Eloise's talents. She saved and invested her earnings from her career as a music teacher over the years in Japan. As the couple's sons became independent and successful and no longer needed their support, Eloise became interested in what other good she might accomplish with her savings. A friend told her about Uncommon Good and the struggles of our young doctors to serve the underprivileged while drowning in their own educational debt. Our MED program helps these young people pay off their school loans so that they can afford to



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Dr. Crystal Unzueta with her benefactor Eloise Dale.

take the lowest paying jobs in the medical profession, those working in community clinics in poor neighborhoods. Desiring to help a young person follow the path of service that she herself had trod, Eloise contacted us and asked if she could assist "a doctor who wanted to return to help his people." We said "Absolutely! But we would like to nominate a doctor who wants to return to help HER people!" Our nominee was Dr. Crystal Unzueta, a child of immigrant factory workers who had recently joined the clinic of one of our first MED program grantees in South Los Angeles. Crystal was \$323,331 in debt and yet had put her concerns about her own well-being aside in order to be a doctor for "her people."

Eloise enthusiastically accepted the nomination of Dr. Crystal to receive her gift. She then sold some of her stock and donated the proceeds, all \$52,155 of it, to help Crystal repay her loans. When Crystal received the news, she burst into tears.

I scheduled a lunch date so the two women could meet each other in person. They hit it off right away and bonded over their shared concern for the poor and their interest in mental health. Crystal told Eloise that her clinic had hired two licensed clinical social workers and that every patient was being screened for depression. Her estimate is that up to 50% of the patients of the practice were suffering from mental health issues and treatment for these conditions was the service most requested from her clientele. This was especially true at that particular moment because of the recent murder of African American musician, entrepreneur, social justice activist and role model Nipsey Hussle whose activities had been bringing hope into the struggling neighborhood. Crystal said that when she asked her teen patients what they enjoyed, they were so shut down and depressed that they could not give her an answer. Part of her mission is to change this through mental health services and advocating for programs in the schools and the community to give kids hope and get them engaged in life.

It was such a privilege to listen in on the conversation of these two inspiring women activists from two different generations as they shared their wisdom and experience with each other. And we are so very grateful to Eloise for extending her hand so generously across the generational divide to ease the burden of a remarkable young woman who is following in her footsteps of service.

The United Nation's Harmony with Nature Dialogue Celebrating Mother Earth Day 2019

by Uncommon Good Board Member Marsha Moutrie

The themes of this year's Earth Day dialogue at the United Nations headquarters in New York, which I was privileged to attend, were Education in Harmony with Nature and Climate Action in Harmony with Nature. This subject is close to my heart as a Board Member at Uncommon Good where we teach our students about the importance of being advocates for the well-being of the earth. The event was convened by Maria Espinosa, the President of the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly. She described the current environmental crisis and called for human life to be in balance with Nature: stopping irrational, unlimited and unsustainable exploitation of the natural

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Photo by Carlos Carrillo

Uncommon Good students planting native plants.

The Joy of Mentoring *(con't. from page 1)*

first full year of college without a single interaction with children (not including drunken college students), I decided to pay a visit to a local nonprofit called Uncommon Good in the hopes of becoming a mentor for an elementary school kid. The dome-shaped, adobe building tucked back behind an old parking lot buzzed with bees, volunteers, and an intangible yet undeniable sense of selfless dedication. This is probably because Uncommon Good does about a million things for the surrounding community, one of which is running a mentor program to help smart but underprivileged kids to excel in school and pursue higher education. The idea is to match kids growing up in low-income families who show academic promise with college students who will help them with schoolwork, provide guidance, and talk to them about college.

You would have to talk to Madeleine and I for about two minutes to know that she and I should be paired together. In our separate Uncommon Good interviews, we probably showed all the basic signs of compatibility—We're both tomboys, both talkative, both sarcastic. But as I spent more time with Madeleine, it became clear that the similarities between us go far beyond the basic compatibility questions of the interview. It was a perfect match, serendipitous even.

Madeleine collects rocks and minerals. I collect rocks and minerals. I take her to the Gems and Minerals exhibit at the Los Angeles History Museum. Madeleine finds potty humor hilarious. I find potty humor hilarious. I show her the Captain Underpants comic book series. Madeleine likes to tease. I like to tease. We call each other names: "You big nerd!" "You little goon!" "Weirdo." "Goofball." Madeleine's house is too small to have friends stay over. My house was too small to have friends stay over. We laugh about sharing one bathroom with the whole family. Madeleine isn't sure if she can go to a good college. I didn't think I could go to a good college. I show her my campus and my dorm and explain how I found a way to do it.

Madeleine came to Uncommon Good looking for someone to help her improve her reading and writing skills so she could pass a test called the CELDT, or the California English Language Development Test. California state law requires kids growing up in non-English speaking homes to reach English language proficiency through an English Learners program.

English language education policy first came about in 1974 after a Supreme Court case called *Lou v. Nichol* ruled that failing to provide English language instruction to non-English speakers "denies them a meaningful opportunity to participate in the public educational program and thus violates 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964." The efforts made by the public school system in California to comply with the ruling eventually took the form of the English Learners program seen today, which—unsurprising in the realm of the public education—includes a standardized test. When Madeleine and I first started meeting, one of her biggest concerns was making her way out of the English Learners program. This meant passing the CELDT.

To learn a little more about what the CELDT involves and who has to take it, I visited the California Department of Education website and found myself swimming in a sea of acronyms. "For all students in kindergarten through grade twelve, upon first enrollment in a California public school, the LEA uses a standardized procedure to determine a student's primary language. This procedure usually begins with a home language survey (HLS), which is completed by the parents or guardians at the time the student is first enrolled." A little later, "Under current state law (Education Code Section 313[f]), students who are identified as English learners must participate in the annual administration of the CELDT until they are identified as RFEP." To further the acronyms, there is a "Glossary of Terms and Acronyms" page dedicated to deciphering the CELDT Newspeak.

After filling in the acronyms, I was able to glean a few main points. Essentially, the aim of the test is to identify students who grow up in non-English-speaking homes, sort them into an English learning program designed by their local school district, and then annually gauge the English learner students' progress to determine if their listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities have reached English fluency. If they don't pass, then it's on with the district's English learning program. If they do, the student becomes RFEP, or, Reclassified Fluid English Proficient.

The only word that mattered to Madeleine in any of this was "Reclassified." To reclassify was to be freed from the mornings spent in an English Learners program instead of in regular class. It was to be able to focus on science projects and book reports instead of having to prove her language adequacy. For Madeleine, reclassifying meant achieving what many of her peers in the Pomona Unified School District (PUSD) have not. As of 2016, Madeleine's school district had 24,716 students enrolled across its elementary, middle, and high schools. Of those students, about sixty percent were labeled "English learner students," and of that sixty percent, only forty percent had reclassified.

Madeleine and I had some serious work to do. After being introduced for the first time at Uncommon Good to go over the basics of the program, we began meeting two hours a week at the college library to develop Madeleine's reading and writing skills.

Here's the thing about "serious work" and a nine (now eleven)-year-old kid jacked

up on sugar packets: it is damn difficult to make happen for more than five minutes at a time. Every time we meet, Madeleine comes equipped with a procrastination arsenal:

A new riddle - "If you're on a plane that's burning and crashing, where do you come out? ... You don't know it, seriously? Oh my god it's so easy. A kindergartener could get it. You're thinking too much, nerd. ... Okay, okay. You come out in the news!"

A story about a classmate - "You know that kid that I was telling you about? The one that's very funny? Marlin Sodano? He's smart though. He's read like the Rick Riordan books and all of that. Him and me always compete because we both like math. And we got. ... we saw our test yesterday? He got 194 and I got 191. And I was like, I still beat you though because I'm eleven you're twelve. He's like no! No!"

A new toy - "It's a 3D puzzle. You have to untangle all the loops from each other. No not like that! Oh my god. But you don't know how to put it back together now do you?"

It's a ceremonial tug-of-war that we both know will eventually end in her pulling out her homework.

Once the initial battle is won and she plops her homework down on the table, it's on to the next painstaking power struggle. There are times when Madeleine seems to think that every sentence written deserves a break in between, or she suddenly gets thirsty and opening her water bottle becomes the world's most difficult task. "It's stuck!" A few drops spill out when she pries it open, and she has to wipe off the entire table. Then her mechanical pencil malfunctions. She presses down to write and the lead snaps. Click click click. Snap. Click click click. If you've ever tried to keep an elementary school student focused on her homework, you begin to understand why Adderall gets thrown around like candy.

On the increasingly rare days when she doesn't have homework, I bring short stories for us to read out loud. After reading Ray Bradbury's "All Summer in a Day," a couple weeks ago, Madeleine groaned and slammed her hand on the table. "Ugh! Why do you always pick the stories with sad endings?" A couple moments later she conceded, "That was a pretty good story."

Madeleine tells me that she reads at school while the teacher is talking. I ask if this gets her into trouble. She says no "because the teacher knows that I pay attention anyway and I do everything she asks." Madeleine's classmates seem to care infinitely less about school than she. "Our teacher is always yelling at somebody. ... So, I read."

When we first started meeting, Madeleine was in fourth grade and did not know the difference between cities, states, and countries. She could solve complex math problems in seconds and give insightful interpretations of literary symbols, but she lacked basic knowledge about geography and history. I couldn't help but be upset at the disparity between how little she was learning in school and how great her capacity for learning is. So much time had already been lost for her in relation to her peers attending affluent public and private schools.

Growing increasingly curious about the state of the education system Madeleine was dealt, I set up a meeting with someone named Nancy at Uncommon Good to try to get some insight. The next week, I rode my skateboard up for my second visit to the hidden adobe dome building and sat waiting to meet Nancy on a bench in the small building's main cavity. Smiling do-gooders shuffled in and out of the front doors carrying cardboard boxes of rich, greeny produce and citrus. I was eyeing the box of fragrant oranges sitting beside me when a voice came out of nowhere and startled me. "You must be Makella." Nancy Dufford (official title: "Program Coordinator", unofficial title: "The Doer of Whatever Needs to Get Done") occupies a thin frame with wispy brown hair, and soft-soled shoes. Over the course of our meeting, I began to wonder how so much information and vigor was packed into such a small frame.

Nancy laughed when I asked if she had any opinions on the education system in the greater Los Angeles area. The schools are suffering, she said, especially those in the Pomona Unified School District (PUSD). My heart gave a slight twinge. Madeleine's district. Nancy mercilessly continued, "There is a lack of funding all around." She noted the limited resources and the limited parent involvement, many because they speak limited English and feel they don't have the authority to question how things are being done or to make demands. Nancy also stressed the fact that "low-income" is a common identifying thread for residents in the district. Turns out that having a cohort of wealthy, gung-ho, being-a-parent-is-a-full-time-job moms and dads makes quite a difference in a school's quality. They have the time, confidence, and resources to put the pressure on schools to perform where others don't.

The information reported by EdData.org on student performance in Madeleine's district reflects Nancy's account. The academic performance and college preparedness of students in PUSD falls well below that of students in LA County and California at large in almost every area: Cohort dropouts, standard math and English tests scores, number of SAT and ACT test takers. ... Over the course of four graduating classes (2011-2015), the number of students in Madeleine's district who met the acceptance requirements for any UC or California State school did not exceed forty percent. My eyebrows sunk deeper with every scroll of the mouse.

A stout and energetic man with perfectly combed hair sauntered in and out of the room where Nancy and I were chatting. He chimed in here and there to fill in information gaps in Nancy's knowledge bank. "That's Carlos." Nancy informed me of his official title



Uncommon Good mentor Makella Brems, with her mentee.



Mentor Makella Brems and her mentee, Madeleine, embrace at Makella's college graduation.

(Education Programs Director). I assume his unofficial title reflects the same sort of superhuman versatility as Nancy's. When I asked about the English Learners program and the CELDT, Carlos was the first to speak. "Oh, it's completely useless." Keep in mind; this is the test that Madeleine had spent the better half of her young life worrying about and what she and I had spent several months working for. "The school doesn't send us scores from previous tests. They give no advanced notice for when the test will take place, and a lot of times teachers don't have the time, the qualifications, or even an understanding of how people learning a new language need to be helped."

When I asked Madeleine if I could write a story about our time together at the end of one of our lessons, she said yes. Well, first she said, "I'll be like, no I hated my time with her. No more questions." And then she said yes. I told her that I'd like to talk about the English Learner program since it's something she has had to think about quite a bit. "Yeah because we're Mexican." She looked at her older brother (a soft-spoken, soccer-loving seventh-grader), who had come to say hi at the end of that day's lesson, as she spoke. "Well, we're son and daughter of Mexicans. So we have to take that test, but if you were an American you don't have to. That's what I don't like. It's...it's... You wouldn't have to take it." She's right, of course. I was born into an environment of people that happen to speak the "universal language," the language which has also been deemed one of the hardest languages to learn and one that is just plain silly at times, example provided below.[1] I had English and all the intuitive writing know-hows that come with being a native speaker handed to me. "You can't write that sentence like that," I tell Madeleine. "Why?" "Because...um...well... It just doesn't sound right." Some help that is. I find myself regularly looking up English grammar to explain rules I don't know but use every single day. Madeleine, on the other hand, has had to put countless hours into learning and developing something that many of her peers do not even give a thought to.

I'm not saying that English fluency isn't important for Madeleine to develop. It is absolutely important. Having complete control over and confidence in her ability to communicate will undoubtedly help Madeleine achieve the greatness I believe she is capable of. I am saying it is hard to do. And I am saying that it makes me want to quite possibly rip someone's hair out when I hear the word "lazy" being thrown around with the words "immigrant" and "Mexican."

Madeleine may come to our meetings with riddles and stories and toys, but she also comes with a desire to learn and improve that far exceeds any elementary school student I know and is rarely matched by my own peers in college. She recognizes what hard work will do for her. She engages with every assignment she's given, and she's never once asked me, "Why do we have to learn this? What's the point?" In our first couple meetings, I stressed the importance of reading. "You can't read enough. It is going to help you so much with your writing." That school year, she earned the most reading points out of anyone in her grade. Just a few weeks ago, I gave her the first book in The Series of Unfortunate Events. She came to our most recent lesson announcing, "I'm on Book Nine!" She also got student of the month this year for March.

Back at Uncommon Good, Carlos had grown curious in mine and Nancy's conversation. "Who is your mentee?" "Madeleine," I responded without expecting him to know much about her; there are over 350 kids in the mentor program. He raised his eyebrows in immediate recognition. "Oh, she's...she is..." he never actually labeled her with an adjective, but his raised eyebrows and slow head-nod gave her a credit more deserving than any word could. The closest I can get to articulating his facial expression is probably "exceptional." I nodded in agreement. Madeleine truly is exceptional.

As is her family. What I already knew about her mom and dad was that, in addition to making the twenty-minute drive for Madeleine to meet with me once a week, they also take her to Uncommon Good's extracurricular activities: music lessons, writing workshops, local gardening events, and to all of our hangouts outside of our regular weekly meetings. They do the same for her brother, whose extracurricular schedule is similarly jam-packed. What I learned during my meeting with Nancy and Carlos is that Madeleine's parents help run a monthly parent education program at Uncommon Good. Many of the sessions focus

on how parents can support their children's education and become active participants in the civic affairs of their neighborhoods. Needless to say, Madeleine's parents are deeply invested in the wellbeing of their children and of their community.

I asked Madeleine about her parents' work with Uncommon Good, and she pulled up a video of her mother on a local news station. Her mother and some fellow community leaders were yielding signs encouraging the establishment of immigration sanctuaries at local churches. "My mom and my brother are scared but me and my dad? We're not scared." My biggest concerns at her age were winning the relay race at Field Day and finishing the fourth Harry Potter book by the time the movie came out at Christmas.

As a government major, Madeleine's initial lack of interest in politics and history pained me. "It's cool stuff!" She gave her best eye roll. "No, seriously!" I tried drawing diagrams of the checks and balances system. I ranted about how crazy it is that we're still governed by a document that was written over two hundred years ago. I even tried to entice her with the story of how Preston Brooks beat Charles Sumner with a cane on the Senate floor after they got into a tiff about slavery. She blinked at me disapprovingly. "Nerd."

Over the course of the Presidential election, I saw a change in her. She wanted to talk about what she had heard on the news, from her friends, from the Internet. She talked about the language being thrown around in relation to immigration policy. "That's racism." It was the first time I had heard her mention race. It has been a regular point of discussion since. I started to wish that she could go on not having to know or care about the government. The week after the general election, Madeleine came to me saying, "He didn't win the popular vote, though. Only the electoral college." Well, at least now she knows about the electoral college, I thought as I tried to find some silver lining.

As the world grew more tumultuous, Madeleine and I carried on with our lessons. Each week, she eked out sentence by sentence with her pencil held between sugarcoated fingers. Once she finished a paragraph, she would hand her paper over to me so we could go through it together. I circled misspelled words and missing punctuation as she grumbled.

"What do you think I'm going to say about that sentence? What's missing?"

"I don't know!"

"Yes you do. Read it out loud. You'll catch it right away."

"When the kids arrived at the party they gathered in the gym." She pauses for a second, looks at me, adds a comma.

"Yes! See? You know how to do it. You just have to take your time and read it over."

I found myself marking up her papers less and less as the weeks went on and the CELDT date approached.

At the end of our lessons each week, Madeleine's mother always comes into the library to meet us. She inquires how Madeleine is doing and asks me how I am doing. I then stumble over my Spanish and am forced to reflect on how little I retained from my four-plus years of Spanish classes. "Era muy bien, como siempre. Nosotros um..." I desperately look to Madeleine for help. Suddenly I go from being tutor to tutee and Madeleine becomes my communication lifeline. Madeleine silently smiles back and continues to watch me struggle with pleasure. "Como se dice, 'We read a short story?'" Madeleine's mom, always coming to my rescue, answers me patiently. "Leímos un cuento."

Usually Madeleine's mom drops Madeleine off at the door, and I only see her at the end of our lessons, but a couple weeks after the test came and went, I walked into the library to find Madeleine and her mom both waiting eagerly for me to come through the door. "Oh hi!" I said, surprised. "Cómo estás?" Her mom, beaming, nudged Madeleine toward me. In a moment of uncharacteristic sheepishness, Madeleine blushed and held out a white envelope. I took it and looked up at Madeleine. "What's this?" The smile on her face pushed her reddened cheeks up until her eyes became little shining crescents. I pulled out the envelope's contents to find a packet of performance graphs and scores. Madeleine had passed the CELDT with flying colors. On that Thursday, after so many afternoons spent studying with me and writing at workshops and reading with her mom, Madeleine and I ditched our backpacks and played some soccer.

I must confess that I have a complaint about Uncommon Good's mentor program, which is that it must inevitably come to an end.

"Well, so I leave right after graduation, like the day after."

"Nooo!" Madeleine objects. I hold back the tears.

"But I'll be in Arizona for the summer so I won't be that far away!"

A couple weeks ago, Madeleine's family invited me over to their home for a celebratory dinner of Madeleine's mom's homemade tamales (indisputably the best in the world) and Champurrado. When I walked into the house, I was emotionally ambushed by balloons and a big "Welcome" sign Madeleine had made. I escaped to the kitchen with watery eyes only to be hit by a second wave of heartthrob. They had taped photos to the window of all the places Madeleine and I had gone and the things we had done together over the course of the past two years—Madeleine and I standing by a piñata dressed in our Halloween costumes, collecting Easter eggs, jumping on a giant trampoline, peering through a microscope at a museum. I fought back the tears with full force, but this time one got away. [1] "People can sit on a bough, though, and cough through the night as they re-read a red book to say they re-read it; and whomever finishes first has won one!" - Dr. Albrecht Classen

Early Trauma Becomes Inspiration for Healer

(con't. from page 1)

controlled by a lottery and every year a handful of people, out of many millions, won the chance to immigrate. In 2004 Marina's mother won the immigration lottery, entitling the whole family to move. Her father was eager to go, enticed by the glimpses of his uncle's life in America. Her mother was very conflicted because while she wanted more opportunities for her girls, uprooting themselves would mean that she would have to leave behind all of her family and friends, perhaps never to see them again, and leave her beautiful country, famed for its mountains, Black Sea shores and roses.

Even though she spoke no English, sixteen-year-old Marina was excited about the move because she had grown up watching old dubbed Hollywood movies and her mind was filled with glamorous dreams of what life would be like here. Of course the reality, once the family arrived, was very different. Her Bulgarian speaking parents struggled to find work and she was put in a high school in which she had one ESL class but all of the other classes were in English. She brought a dictionary with her to class and painstakingly translated her textbooks, one word at a time. However, within just one year, she had worked her way into an honors English class and was receiving compliments on her writing from her teachers! She even started taking accelerated classes at the local community college. Remarkably, in addition to speaking her native Bulgarian and now English, Marina is also conversational in Spanish, German and Russian.

“Marina has a particularly vivid recall of a seven-year-old girl who had been tied up to get dental care.”

Even though she was a brilliant student, Marina struggled socially at first. “Because I didn't speak the language, I couldn't have friends,” she explained. So she threw herself into her studies, attending community college and then transferring to UCLA where she earned a Bachelor of Science degree in biology while commuting and working two jobs. One of those jobs was cleaning a dental lab. By this time, she had gotten over her childhood terror of dentistry. When she had been a middle school student back in Bulgaria, her best friend's mother had been a dentist. The girls would go to her office after school, and because she wasn't there as a patient, it wasn't threatening for Marina. In fact, her naturally inquiring mind got interested in the technical side of the profession. But when she got her college job working at a dental lab here in the U.S. she was amazed by what she saw: digital x-rays and x-ray monitors, specialized computer software, hi tech suction devices, and much more. A thought entered her mind which she never had imagined that she might entertain: perhaps she could become a dentist and be able to help little kids never to have to go through the dental trauma that she experienced.

Through an enormous amount of hard work and determination, Marina's dream became a reality. She was accepted into the dental program at Western University of Health Sciences and graduated with her Doctor of Medicine in Dentistry degree in 2015. She then extended her education with one year of Advanced Education in General Dentistry. Upon graduation, she owed over \$360,000 in educational debt. Despite this horrifying burden, she still chose to follow her heart, and accepted a job in a community clinic in South Dakota serving a low-income clientele. She recalls one patient from her time there who typified the satisfaction she received from her work. He was a big powerfully built man in his forties who had recently been released from jail. While incarcerated, he had decided to reform his life and now was seeking employment. But he was missing many teeth and this was impeding his job search. Marina fitted him for dentures and on the day that she delivered them to him, he broke down in tears of gratitude, telling her that this was the first day of the new chapter in his life.

Marina loved her work in South Dakota, but after two and a half years she missed her extended family back in Southern California. So when she saw an ad for a dentist at the ParkTree Community Health Center in Pomona, a community clinic near her old dental school, she applied and was hired. In the meantime, however, due to interest rates, her educational loan balance was actually increasing and she now owed \$422,000, which was \$62,000 more than when she graduated! Yet even though she was drowning in debt, she remained committed to being a dentist for the poor. Once established in Pomona, she reached out to us at Uncommon Good to let us know that she was in the community and would like to serve our families. As we chatted about her practice, I asked her about her student loans and learned about her desperate circumstances. With generous funding first from the S. Mark Taper Foundation, and then from The Rose Hills Foundation, we were able to provide her with loan repayment assistance, reversing her slide into ever deeper debt.

In her practice at ParkTree, Marina especially appreciates the chance to help children. However, like her own family, most of the families she serves lack dental education and bring their children in for their first dental appointment too late. Most of the parents never have been to a dentist themselves, and their children have decay in all of their back teeth by the time she sees them. Parents put sugar in their children's milk and don't think that so called baby teeth are important and so they don't have them brush or floss. They don't realize that infection in the baby teeth can harm later adult teeth or the child's overall health. And the infections spread rapidly in children's mouths because the enamel on their teeth is thinner than that on adult teeth. Overall, Marina says that there is much more need for dental care than she saw in South Dakota, and the problems she is treating here are more complex.

As part of caring for her young patients, Marina educates the parents. She tells them that cavities are caused by a bacteria that a mom can transfer to a child if her own teeth are diseased and she tastes her child's food. She talks to them about limiting sugar and not snacking between meals to keep the mouth neutral and bacteria free for longer periods.

But her favorite aspect of the work is helping children to overcome their fear of the dentist. Marina has a particularly vivid recall of a seven-year-old girl who had been tied up to get dental care. By the time Marina saw her, she had adult teeth coming in that already had cavities and she cried with fear at being brought to the dentist. But Marina has discovered that talking to her child patients with respect, as if they were adults, brings the best results. If she speaks to them in baby talk they became suspicious that she's trying to pull something on them. She shows them her instruments and explains what they do. She is very honest and tells them that they will feel a little pinch for a few seconds but then they will feel ok. And of course, after being brave, they get a toy afterwards! After meeting Marina and being treated with gentleness and compassion by her, the little girl calmed down and never resisted coming to the dentist again. The child's mother says that she is always talking now about the nice girl dentist and that she wants to be one, too, when she grows up.

Marina hasn't just inspired her patients, but has motivated her family as well. Her younger sister followed in her footsteps and became a pediatric dentist. Her mother learned English and also went to school, eventually becoming a social worker for Los Angeles County for people in group homes.

Marina is grateful that The Rose Hills Foundation and the S. Mark Taper Foundation have eased her financial stress through our loan repayment assistance program. Before receiving our assistance, she was rationing her own healthcare, questioning whether she really could go to the doctor and pay for the co-payments and medications for herself. Now she no longer worries about working at the lowest paying end of the medical profession and is relieved that she does not have to pit her own economic well-being against her patients' needs.

Let's leave the last words to Marina as she reflects on her immigrant journey:

“Moving to the United States at the vulnerable age of 16 was not an easy transition, but it made me the strong and compassionate person and dental provider I am today. Just like my patients at ParkTree I was not privileged but I was motivated to strive for success and make my parents proud because I knew that they made a great sacrifice to move across the world so that I could have better opportunities. Now I acknowledge the struggles my patients go through every day and I feel eager to help them improve their life in any way I can.”



Dr. Marina Markova with a happy dental patient.

The United Nations Harmony

(con't. from page 3)

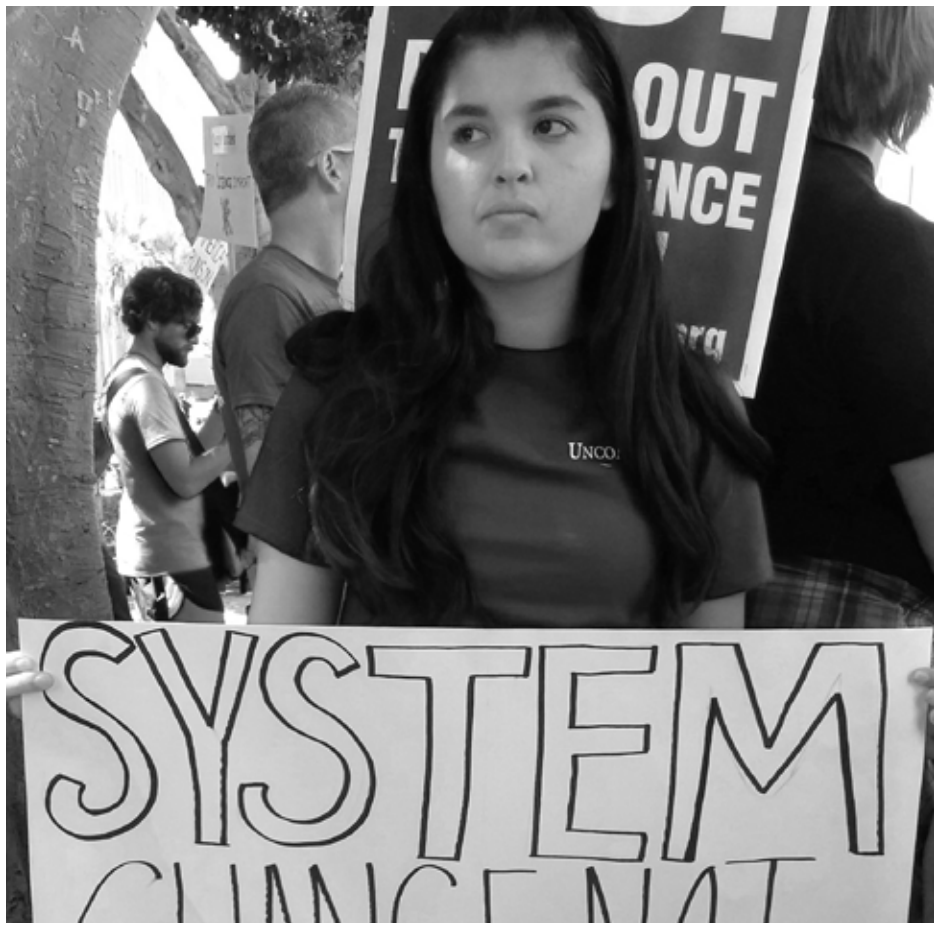


Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good student Yajaira at the March for Science.

world and creating a development model which respects Nature's rights to exist and fosters her regenerative powers.

The event's presenters emphasized the urgent need to reconceive our human relationship with Nature, recognizing that we are part of it, not its masters. They warned that failing to respect it and serve as its guardians will result in continued destruction of Earth, which risks the welfare and lives of our children and descendants. The representative of Bangladesh stressed his nation's fragility; though it has contributed very little to environmental degradation (because of low production and consumption), it will bear the brunt of other richer nations' activities -- an anticipated 40 million residents face displacement in this century. The representative of India invited attention to the New York Times editorial of the day before, entitled "The Earth Is Just As Alive As You Are". It explains that the Earth functions as a single, integrated, living system, e.g., deforestation of the Amazon, changes the rainfall in Canada; and he stressed living in harmony with Nature as the key to living well. Markie Miller of Toledo, Ohio, talked about her city's initiative measure amending the charter to recognize the rights of Lake Erie. [It was drafted by CELDF and challenged in a lawsuit filed by a farmer the day after the initiative's adoption; Ms. Markie acknowledged that the measure "faces an uphill battle in court" but expressed the viewpoint that, "We don't lose until we quit."]

The panel members and video-taped speakers from around the world, included judges, scholars, educators, lawyers, activists, officials, NGO representatives and an artist. The moderator was Alessandro Pelizzon (Southern Cross University). He introduced the first panel, focusing on education, by harkening back to Sierra Club v. Morton and the question of "Who speaks for the trees." [The international Rights of Nature movement continues to focus on issues related to standing. Recognizing Nature's "personhood" is perceived as the key to affording adequate respect, eliminating the notion that Nature is simply human property, and empowering Nature with legal recourse against environmental destruction.] He pointed out that in any system, including Earth, protection of a system requires protection of its members or parts -- the two endeavors are inseparable. But, in property based legal systems, the members or parts of the natural system, e.g., the forest, are legally "invisible."

Justice Antonio Benjamin of the Brazilian High Court explained, by video, that it is very difficult to import Nature into legal and ethical systems. However, judges must play a role in the dialogue, transition and re-education required by the mounting environmental disaster. A Bolivian speaker said that his pluralistic nation has resolved tensions about who speaks for Nature by embracing the notion of "collective rights" -- everyone can speak for Nature and make proposals to the government. He added that they disfavor the term "ecosystem" because all Earth is one system, and they avoid the term "resources" because it reinforces the notion of Earth existing for the benefit of humans. He advocated local efforts as most effective. A professor (from Bologna), reiterated the over-arching theme of changing the legal paradigm. She stressed recognizing the inherent weakness of monocultures of all types, e.g., agricultural, social and philosophical.

Dr. Thomas Egli (Switzerland) stressed the importance of education through



Photo by Carlos Carrillo

Uncommon Good students at their annual beach clean up event.



Photo by Carlos Carrillo

Uncommon Good student enjoying nature at the Woodcraft Rangers Outdoor Science Camp.

participatory research, science projects, and nature camps for parents and children. Students must be "placed in Nature" to learn by process, not by theory. He offered two diagrams, both circles with various living beings around the circumference. In one, man stood, alone, in the circle's center; in the other diagram, man stood with the many other life forms ringing the circumference. Dr. Elizabeth McPherson (New Zealand) advocated early training for children and law students. In her country, primary school children participate in a program for monitoring river health. They learn that it is their responsibility to help care for Earth and not just use it. She also stressed her country's recognition and celebration of the contribution of native peoples, and its embrace of the Maori concepts of "Earth guardianship." A French artist spoke about the need for participant action, not leadership. He stressed using the universal languages of music and art, which do not instill feelings of guilt [as words may], to better connect people to Nature and help them understand, e.g., the fragility of our "relationship with food."

A compelling video featured attorney Frank Bibeau, a leader of the White Earth Band of the Chippewa. The tribe has adopted a law recognizing the Rights of Manoomin (wild rice), which is their staple food and center of spirituality and culture. Oil and gas extraction and transport are threatening the wild rice, which cannot flourish without clean water. Mr. Bibeau explained that his nation's legal rights, including those created by 44 treaties with the US, may be the key to judicial recognition of Nature's rights in the United States because, unlike most US communities, his is not subject to local or state laws that protect corporate activities and property rights. In addition to the treaties, his people can rely on customary and even international law to, e.g., obtain authority over pipeline permit issuance. Bibeau cautioned: "Education alone will not stop big oil." [I note that a recent article about the Rights of Manoomin appeared in one of the oil industry journals. The author's pro-industry tone was highly derisive, but he also warned his readers that they must wake up to the real political threat posed by the Rights of Nature movement. Apparently, the Chippewa have Big Oil's attention.]

The former French Minister of Ecology said, "Nature is dying" in France; 80% of the insect population and 80-90% of the fish population have been destroyed. She advocated for an international criminal court with jurisdiction to hear cases on ecocide. She stressed that breaking with Nature is dehumanizing and that we must

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The United Nations Harmony

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recognize the continuity of all life. We should also stop characterizing the crisis as (merely) “climate change” and recognize all parts of this collapse of life, e.g., ocean acidification, excess release of GHG’s, pollution, deforestation, over use of fresh water, soil degradation, etc. She asked, “How did we get here?” and answered, “We wanted to be free of natural constrains. We were greedy.” Today, we realize that indigenous law is closer to natural science than our current laws, which protect corporations and trade at the expense of human rights. We must recognize that there are limits, planetary boundaries that we cannot exceed. They should be incorporated into our laws.

The afternoon session began with a video from the European Economic Social Committee. The representative warned that we must avoid two pitfalls: (1) settling for “window dressing” that merely enshrines the status quo by e.g., assigning a dollar value to Nature and allowing offsetting; and (2) placing the cost of a transition on those least able to pay. We must seek climate justice as we transition to carbon neutral economies. The committee is working on a “charter” for the Rights of Nature and a “circular economy.” A second video speaker described our current economic systems as based on the notion of limitless profit, limitless growth and limitless consumption. We must replace this with recognition of Earth’s “carrying capacity”; and we must foster ethics of stewardship and community; and we must learn from indigenous people. People will be moved by their spiritual connection to Nature.

Dr. Freddy Delgado (Bolivia) spoke about helping students learn by connecting them with indigenous peoples. An attorney from Colombia talked about her work (as a plaintiff and attorney) on the Columbian case recognizing the legal rights of the Amazon River. This first Rights of Nature suit in South America was brought to protect the rights of future generations and was based on language added to the constitution establishing the legal right to a healthy environment. The favorable decision recognized this right and the principle of solidarity among all living things. The next speaker was the judge on that case, who lamented that constitutions aren’t enforced in Latin America. [Nor was the judgment in that case; according to press reports, deforestation continues unabated). The judge advocated for

mandatory education on Rights of Nature. She also advocated changing terminology, e.g., disasters should not be called “natural disasters” if they are caused by man.

A speaker from France reiterated the notion that indigenous law is closer to natural science than our current law and said that the separation in law between people and the world is “wrong” because “all beings and places are one.” Deforestation of the Amazon reduces rainfall around the world. The movement is growing. There have been 25 Rights of Nature trials in South American and 21 wins. Judges are innovators in South American, especially in Colombia, but the judgements aren’t enforced. Planetary boundaries must somehow be incorporated into law. Another speaker advocated recognizing environmental crimes in times of peace, as well as in war, noting that “ecocide, in Greek, means destroying our house”.

By video, author and scholar David Boyd (The Rights of Nature), characterized us as being caught in a race between education and catastrophe. He said, we must make children ecologically literate, must treat nature as a community to which we all belong, and must avoid the injustice of the worst impacts falling on the people who did not cause the catastrophe. We must also address unsustainable levels of production and consumption in some countries and enhance support for developing nations.

Themes seemed to me to emerge from the day of presentations. They included the importance of: (1) recognizing planetary limits or boundaries and trying to incorporate them into law; (2) educating youth and parents in Nature as well as in the classroom; (3) learning from indigenous peoples how to live harmoniously with Nature; (4) rejecting the reprehensible expedient of displacing the cost of environmental destruction onto the poorest nations and peoples who have caused the least harm; and (5) appealing to people’s spirituality, feelings and sense of community to spread the understanding that we are part of Nature and must live together in harmony.



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