Blog
Spirituality



Samantha Kominiarek, right, enjoys the beauty of White Sands National Park with her parents (Provided photo)



by Samantha Kominiarek

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 10th round of bloggers: Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker in Orange, California, and Samantha Kominiarek is an Assumption Mission Associate in Chaparral, New Mexico.*

My parents came to visit! I have been smiling for the past month at just the thought of having them here in Chaparral with me, experiencing the warmth that is so present here.

My mom and dad arrived on Thursday, Jan. 23, just in time for the second weekly meeting of Club de Ms. K, the name my students picked for the after-school activities club I started. The purpose of this club is to create a space for students to engage in fun activities and personal development exercises that will promote more English conversation for my emergent bilingual seventh-grade students.



A fun game of Frisbee at the after-school club (Provided photo)

That week's meeting began with 25 students, my mom, my dad, Sister Nha Trang and me sitting in a circle to introduce ourselves and share something we love about Chaparral in whichever language is more comfortable for each individual.

Then, we did a mindfulness activity with chocolate, where we spent time looking at and smelling the chocolate before eating it, then being aware of how the chocolate feels once inside of the mouth. Students shared that they enjoyed the chocolate more because of the anticipation they felt.

Later, we spent time playing basketball, Frisbee and soccer outside. I loved seeing my parents interact with my students. My mom taught some girls a few words in French, and my dad encouraged students to successfully catch and throw the Frisbee five times without dropping it, which we never quite accomplished.

Over the next few days, my parents and I saw some of the sights of New Mexico and Texas. We enjoyed a hike in Soledad Canyon, a sunset stroll in White Sands National Park, a cave tour through Carlsbad Caverns National Park, and a walk through downtown El Paso. These were some of the most magnificent places I have ever been to, and it was special to be able to share these experiences with my parents.

Even more special than seeing the natural beauties of the world was being able to introduce my parents to the people I love in Chaparral.

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On Friday night, my friend Mari invited us over for coffee and tea, even though it was the night before her niece's quinceañera, a huge event for which her family had been preparing for months. Mari always tells me I am part of her family and that we are like sisters. When we were all together, I said I felt full of joy because both of my families now know each other. While the conversation was limited because of the language barrier, the feeling of love certainly was not.

On Saturday morning, the Assumption Sisters prepared the most delicious brunch for us. Pancakes, fruit salad, scrambled eggs, pastries from the local *panadería*: The sisters really went all out. The sisters shared more about Chaparral and their religious community.

Afterward, my parents and I drove around Chaparral to visit some of the families who have made this place so special to me. The families invited us into their homes with open arms and lots of hugs. Some shared photos of their grandchildren, while one gave my mom some pinecones from a lovely hike we went on together in Ruidoso, New Mexico. We did not have enough time to meet all the families in Chaparral — that could take days — but the families we did meet gave my parents a warm welcome.



Samantha Kominiarek, left, and her parents pose with the quinceañera at the St. Thomas More Church in Chaparral, New Mexico. (Provided photo)

Then, we went to the quinceañera Mass, which was a beautiful celebration of coming of age. As part of his homily, Father Rodolfo asked the quinceañera, the 15-year-old girl being celebrated, to stand at the altar to look around the room to see all the people who were there to love and support her.

A little later that night, we went to the quinceañera party. The venue was full of handmade decorations in coral, the quinceañera's favorite color, and many kind and loving people. The family served a delightful homemade dinner, and my parents really got to feel the care and love of the people here.

All night, the dance floor was full of people who seemed to know every move to every song. One of my favorite moments of the night was when the grandmother of the quinceañera brought my mom and dad out to the dance floor. I am sure she had plenty of other things to be concerned with that night, but to her, it was important that my parents were included in the celebration and dancing.

This is what I mean when I say Chaparral is full of warmth. (Of course, I also mean that most winter days have been sunny and 60 degrees, which was a pleasant surprise for my mom and dad, who were coming from cold and snowy Massachusetts.) Chaparral is warm because of the way this community makes me feel. The people care about each other here, which is shown through their daily actions of love and solidarity.

The community of Chaparral has made me feel so welcomed and loved. I know my parents felt the same way during their visit here. When presented with the opportunity, I will be sure to treat others with this same warmth.

[Samantha Kominiarek is doing a year of service with the Assumption Mission Associates in Chaparral, New Mexico.]



Clockwise from lower right, Samantha's mom, dad, Sister Chabela, Sister Nha Trang, Sister Carmen, Sister Diana, Sister Tere, and Melissa enjoying the most delicious brunch at Flor y Canto, the Assumption Sisters' convent in Chaparral, New Mexico. (Samantha Kominiarek)

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.