

AS IN THE previous years, the opening of the school year 1966-1967 immediately following the rehabilitating summer vacation, brought in to the USC fold an inundation of unfamiliar new faces, the domination of which is fresh from high school. Among other things, this year is specially significant for it graces our campus with an exceptional student, Leonila Flores.

Leonila is almost like any other ordinary student. Like many girls, she is small, not more than five feet, frail, and youthful. The fact is, her looks are incompatible with her actual age, twenty-three. Endowed with a light humor, now and then, she exchanges chaffs with friends and teachers. She is an entertaining conversationalist who can talk freely about herself in excellent, flowing English.

However, the truth concealed by the dark glasses which never leave her face, manifest itself too vividly in the past, present, and undoubtedly, her future. It yields her a novel pattern of existence, significantly different from that of a normal individual. What little things we take for granted have a deep-seated meaning to her. Perhaps, then, she understand life far better than we do.

It is sad indeed that Leonila can never be regaled by a glorifying dawn when the sun pours color over everything — blue sea, green grass, red and yellow roses . . . Nor will she ever catch a glimpse of the loving faces of her parents, six brothers, and three sisters.

She was only three years old when a complex illness of measles and high fever shut out her vision completely. Her memory was then a total blank. Not a patch of color was retained in her memory that could have been a memento of her sightseeing days.

Leonila is the eldest of ten children born to Roqueza Cabag and Anacleto Flores of Dumanjug, Cebu.

Leonila was not discriminated by the neighborhood children. She played marbles with the boys and was superior to the girls in a blindfolded game. She cleaned the house and watched the store. After a few trials, she was able to cook boiled bananas without a slight burn.

When she was older, her parents decided on exposing her to life's opportunities on equal footing with her brothers and sisters. This includes a good education. They agreed that she would best get it in a school for the deaf and blind. Leonila obstinately refused. The thought of giving up home, where life was secure only because her family cared and loved her, for the outside world, alone, horrified her. She was constantly aware of her handicap which limited much her activities. Though she did not feel any resentment, but was rather resigned to her lot and apparent hopelessness, she indulged in liberal self-commiseration.

However, at the age of thirteen, after soul-searching ruminations, she was finally convinced to be both a boarder and a student in a school for the deaf and blind in Pasay City. She realized that her future would depend on how she would put to worth the potentialities endowed

"A PATCH OF BLUE"

by MELINDA BACOL, Liberal Arts III



LEONILA FLORES

her. Blindness, she persuaded herself to believe, was never an obstacle that gave way to despair but was a challenge.

The discovery that there existed many others who were like her in the school for the deaf and blind, astounded her. At first, the conception of being in their company for a long period of time, perturbed her. She detested their way of getting acquainted with a newcomer by touch.

The first day of school was far from encouraging. She was erringly whipped for the mischief done by her seatmate since the teacher was blind too. But gradually, the repulsive attitude changed to solace. She did not feel quite lonesome and conspicuously different anymore. For in that exclusive world, individuals understood each other. They had identical obstacles to hurdle and they accumulated more or less similar problems.

Through Louis Braille' invention of a system of writing with points, Leonila learned to write, and read as well. Equipped with a stylus which served her both as pen and eraser, ruler, board, and paper, she could take fast dictation. It was amazing to see her sensitive fingers more expertly over the wrongside of the sheet as she read aloud what she had written.

The blind students did not limit their activities within the four walls of the classroom. They also indulged in outdoor activities. Once in a while, they took long rides to the country, and at times, to the busy sections of Quiapo.

Leonila confided that Meycauayan was the only place she could identify due to the offending odor of leather shoes of which the place is noted for.

Bearing the characteristic exuberance of youth, they were not dissuaded from learning how to play volleyball. A ball

placed inside the ball gave away its direction.

A school glee club welcomed students naturally bestowed with singing abilities. Leonila was one of the lucky, gifted individual. She loved to sing.

Dancing was another interesting activity. When the students failed to grasp a difficult dance step apprehended through viva voce instructions, the dance instructor executed, then froze the step, and they learned by touch.

She acquired elementary and secondary learning during her nine years stay in the school for the deaf and blind. In absence of universities specially adapted to the blind, she went home to her family in Dumanjug, Cebu.

With the advancing years, her handicap shrunk, as a seeming colossal impediment into an almost negligible trifle. It did not cause the immediate end of everything after all. Her quest for knowledge was gratified, though channeled, into convergence by different ways and means. The impetus, once at its full swing, was hard to stop. The challenge was only half-way met.

Determined and blazing with hope, she tried the University of San Carlos. Contrary to her expectation of apathy and harsh rejection, she was benignly accepted. Further more, she was conferred a privileged of one-hundred per cent scholarship. And here she is with us!

Conchita, a cousin, escorts her from one room to another. She said, she can manage to go about the campus by herself if anybody will be patient enough to acquaint her by touch, three or four times, the detailed location and position of the various rooms, doors, stairs corners, and grounds of the university.

How will she take the periodical examinations? She can write in Braille and read the answers aloud to the professors

*"Walk together, talk together,
O ye people of the earth
Then and only then shall ye have peace."*

From the Sanskrit

AFS

The Way To World Understanding

Information gathered from AFS sources

by

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AFS '64-'65

THE FOREGOING is the slogan of AFS. The American Field Service International Scholarship with friendship and increased understanding as its aim started in 1914. It was actually founded as a volunteer ambulance service with the French armies and carried thousands of wounded in World War I. It instituted graduate fellowship for French universities between the wars, and served again in World War II, with the Allied armies.

In 1947 it began its new work on the teenage level, 16 to 18 years old — when students are most adaptable, open-minded, and eager to learn. They have been screened, for personality as well as intelligence, in order that the students chosen

be those best qualified to make the experience enriching, both for themselves and for all with whom they come in contact with.

It has rapidly expanded under the spirited leadership of the late Stephen Galatti and now Arthur Howe, Jr. But its success is due to the AFSers themselves, who proved to be real ambassadors. Since then, thousands of students from more than 60 foreign countries have come to live and attend American secondary schools in more than 2,000 communities for a school year of study and firsthand experience. On the other hand, American teenagers from practically every state, study and live with families

abroad — a two-way program of seeing and showing. In this way, youngsters learn to recognize and respect similarities and differences of those who, though they live in different countries, have dreams and efforts similarly directed toward the goal of a peaceful and useful life.

AFSers are encouraged to participate wholeheartedly in the life of their American community, where they attend the senior year of high school and live in carefully selected homes as members of their US families on the same basis as the other young people in the home. There is a give and take. AFSers learn about customs, ideals, interests and problems, while on the other hand, their families and communities will also broaden their horizons by the student's telling of his own country and daily life in his own home.

At the end of their school year, bus trips are organized to broaden the student's picture of the United States. Volunteer groups in communities across the nation are hosts for short parts of the 3-week period, both showing them places of unusual interest and offering their facilities for wholesome relaxation and enjoyment. It is heartwarming to see in addition to the bonds of affection formed among AFS students and the Americans they meet and live with the growth of important friendships among students of many different countries.

Though students must leave at the end of their year, they still continue as members of the American Field Service. The returnees, to the limit of their available time, follow through by spreading word of their experiences in articles and speeches, and put into practice wherever they can, what they learned from their time abroad. They form committees to advise on the selecting of future students and institute the American Abroad Program.

It is interesting to note that many organizations, as well as individuals, contribute to the AFS program which could not have grown as it has without their generous cooperation. Schools waive non-resident tuition and other fees. Family circles are enlarged willingly and without pay to welcome the students, who are treated like the other young people in the home. Communities form volunteer chapters to look after the students and pool their resources to raise the participating contribution for each one. And the general public contributes. Thus, the American Field Service has the cooperation of many helping hands in its effort to open wide the door to a friendlier world.

An American Field Service International Scholarship is an open door which leads to understanding and friendship amongst people of the world.

afterwards. Or she can dictate answers to somebody acting as her secretary.

She formerly planned to major in English but seems to have changed her mind due to a special liking she developed for her present teacher in Philosophy. If things go the right way, she might major in Philosophy and minor in English.

Speaking about hobbies, Leonila collects stamps and derives pleasure from writing letters. She types her letters

to sighted friends and writes in Braille to the blind ones.

Movies are not a monopoly of vision-gifted individuals. Leonila goes to movies also. According to her, some stars have such friendly voices, they must be very pleasant people.

To record, what was her happiest experience? It was when unexpectedly, she was accepted into the University of San Carlos and was the recipient of a one-

hundred per cent scholarship. She feels very happy and extremely grateful to the administration of this university.

The problems are inevitable and cannot be denied. For instance, how will she manage in a laboratory class, mandatory for Liberal Arts students? Cooperating with the grace of God, plus the assistance and understanding of the USC people, she is confident in her going through the ordeal. With such determination and courage, she can't fail.