

Transcript of Geer's Recordings

1. The school has been in existence for seven years and as far as I know, no one has graduated. There are, so far, 22 – no so far about 18 students have returned and there are four more outstanding. We don't know whether they are coming back or not. Classes haven't started yet they should start next week.
2. They are really crammed for space in this school; there is hardly any room inside. Actually, we probably ought to use my bedroom here for a classroom of some sort. I think it would make an excellent workshop, it's just about large enough, but I don't know for sure what could be done with that. There is a great big room downstairs, which has lots of desks in it so it's not really big at all anymore, there is a piano in there, and that's where the kids study especially when they're not having class. We use the front hall for a braille classroom; we use the other end of the hall for typing. There are four typewriters of which one works. And there's the *directoras* office which has two great big desks in it and that's where she stays and does her work and talks all day. And there's a boys dormitory downstairs and a girls dorm upstairs and my room is upstairs. Marilyn uses the upstairs hall for class when it's raining out, and she uses the porch usually. The school itself is situated about two blocks from the *Cartemard*, the Caribbean Sea, which we can, right at the moment, hear roaring in the distance because Hurricane Flora is not too terribly far away. And also it's two or three or four blocks from the university, which is just a hop, skip, and a jump from here, and quite lively too we hear. But the school is probably a mile and a half or two miles out of the center of the city. I mean the real center of the city, it's still in the city and you can get there by going in by *publico*, which is a taxi.
3. Of course, all were really shocked at the assassination of Kennedy and we all, or at least Sandra and I, took that real real hard. It's really hard to even talk about it at this point it's sort of irrational. But we don't see, I don't see, much in the future. Kennedy, as far as I was concerned, was doing an excellent job, had excellent ideas and I don't see who we're going to find to replace him.
4. But we're all going to miss the dynamic push of Kennedy in the alliance for progress and his knowledge and understanding of Latin America and in the Peace Corps and in the Civil Rights areas.
5. What I have been doing when I have been able to is to teach cane travel. Which is one of the things that I do think is most important and therefore I'm very happy doing it. I have been teaching the boys and they've been extremely responsive, some more capable than others obviously. A couple of the kids are pretty capable and one of them can travel by himself, now all he needs to do is do it more and get used to the idea.

6. How frustrated I feel at times with this cane travel course because of the several problems involved with several of the students. I have completed the course with, I think, five students now whom I have taken downtown for their final lesson, and whom I have gone downtown with since just for the hell of it at times, and who are capable although some of them do not take advantage of their capacity at this point to go anywhere they want to. Some of them are perhaps even more capable than I, having more confidence and more understanding of the people they have to deal with. But I'm just wondering where to cut off, where to stop teaching cane travel, because it can go on forever and ever. But as I was saying, a course like this can go on and on forever without ever terminating. And I think that probably there are more important things for me to do than to work on the psychology behind what keeps an individual, several individuals, from learning when there are twice as many or three times as many who can learn readily and take advantage of what they learned. As much as I would like to work with these kids, I think economically my time and what I can do in this country and for these people, with these people, I can better spend my time doing these other things, finding jobs and working on plans and organization.
7. As I have mentioned that I have finished with several of my students in cane travel, I think I finished with five, and so what I would like to be doing now is to start up a course in carpentry. Well we had several problems with trying to start a course in carpentry. One was that we didn't have a workbench or anything else to do this on. When we got a workbench, I figured we could do it outdoors. I haven't gotten around to starting anything, we do have our workbench, it's sitting out back here just about underneath my window, and it's just waiting to be used. We haven't got a saw and we haven't got any wood really to use. We're waiting now for some tools to come in. One of the volunteers has a group of friends at home who belong to an organization and each member of the organization donated a tool and sent them all down. And so after he takes his choice of the tools that he needs and wants, we're going to get our choice so we ought to get some tools here.
8. We have another job here at the school, my friend Vince, who's working at the Rehabilitation Center for Crippled Kids, has asked if we would be able to make crutches for them. I'm starting on a pair now that I'm trying to make first as an example and it's going to be quite interesting. We found a supply of green ebony wood, which is a good kind of wood, it's a hard wood and it seems to be strong and flexible when you get it down to the right dimensions. But knowing what the dimensions are is going to be a matter of trial and error experimentation. I spent the morning, part of the morning, planning down a couple of sticks to be about the right size. I've discovered I'm not such a hot planner because I don't plane in a flat way so you get bumps; you get a dip to the right or a dip to the left in various parts of the wood, so it doesn't come out to be a completely flat and level piece, which is a sign of a bad carpenter. And here I am trying to teach the kids here how to be carpenters. But I think that probably I can suggest what has to be done at times and maybe the kids can do a better job of it than I can, here's hoping anyway.

9. The head of the U.N. Work and Rehabilitation came down and did an evaluation of the country's needs in the field of rehabilitation. This included an evaluation of the Cripple Kids Center, where Vince works, the Blind School, the Leper's Colony, and a few of the rehab centers in hospitals, not rehab centers but facilities, of which there is a minimal amount. The conclusions for the blind school were: One, we should break it up into primary and vocational training school, making the breaking point around age fourteen. Two, that we should get more trained personnel. Three that we need equipment and so forth. His thesis is that when a country puts money into rehabilitating it's disabled that the country stands to gain ten dollars for every one it invests, hence there should be rehabilitation. He also is in favor of an industry for the blind, so to speak, or an industry for disabled persons and is advocating that goodwill industries come in.

10. Some interested citizens are going to try and start a Society for the Blind and this is going to raise money to build and support a rehabilitation center for the blind. A rehabilitation center for the blind is where I should be rather than any school. In a school, I gather you don't teach cane travel, you don't teach shop, and you don't teach daily living skills, usually I should think. To kick off this association they're going to have a dinner on the 10th, which I guess is only five days away since this is the 5th. At which Marilyn and I are supposed to make speeches, well God only knows what we're going to say but we'll see what we can do about it. But this is supposed to start off the society, which will begin to get things rolling on trying to construct this center. This is the same group that's done a center for polio victims, and it's a really good group. Apparently, they've done a really good job, they're really on the ball and they work like dogs so I'm looking forward to seeing what comes out of this.

11. We had a meeting Tuesday night given by the Rotary Club to bring notoriety to the School for the Blind here and also to the Peace Corps who is working here, this involved about 200 guests. We all went to this hotel and ate filet mignon, and I think this is the first time I've ever had it; it was really kind of good. So there was a lot of talking and they gave us each a diploma type thing, which I don't know what it says it's in Spanish, something to do with the Rotary Club. And Marilyn and I were each asked to say something so she talked about the function of the school and what was going on and I got up and talked about the needs and ideals of rehabilitation. I didn't get a whole lot out but what came out I guess came out fairly clearly, so I was pretty happy sort of. This dinner was really kind of funny because it was so typically unorganized. They brought a whole mess of equipment over so that the people could be shown what was used at the school. Whoever chose it didn't do a very good job, they chose inappropriate stuff, stuff the kids hadn't seen before, this sort of thing. When it came time to explain it they got the kids up there in awkward positions and with strange equipment or only half of it.

12. Also a couple days before we managed to get on TV demonstrating the use of the cane and giving a sample of what the kids can do. We had them crossing a couple streets, we had one of them walking down one of the busier streets in town, and it worked very well. So with all this and the publicity from the other night we've had a lot of attention here. A lot of guests, people dropping in, people stopping to ask us questions, they've always stopped to ask us questions but they questions have changed a little bit. Andy, our Peace Corps director here, has been really pleased with all the publicity and all the stuff we have gotten, and I guess he's pleased most of all because it shows up well.
13. One interesting thing whenever you go into a barrio, whenever I go anywhere, is the overwhelming ignorance and incredulity that a blind person can actually do anything. There was one day when Sandra and I were walking down by the sea getting something to eat at one of the seaside restaurants. There were some holes along the side, I wanted to see them so I would know where they are, and I wouldn't push my students into them. And Sandra took me up to one and I stuck my cane in and was wiggling it around and people who were sitting on the wall by the sea thought that was terrible. They thought that she was going to push me in, they thought that was awful and were upset about it. You can tell some of the people here a million times that you don't need their help, and you'd rather be left alone and the kids are learning and they're in class and they don't want to be bothered and they'll still follow you and they'll tell you turn right, turn left, step up, and so forth. It's very hard to get across to a lot of people that we actually can do some of the things we can by ourselves. This is going to be one of the biggest problems in the employment task we have ahead of us, trying to get people to believe and trust that we can do the work and do it as well if not better than anyone else. I'm afraid that most of our employment is going to be done on a paternalistic basis, "I want to do something for you." It isn't going to mean that the individual involved is earning his money so much as it is that it's being given to him and this is the sacrifice on the part of the employer.
14. We've had interviews with practically everyone who's going to graduate this year. Getting the idea set in their minds that they are going to graduate, trying to figure out what they need to do between now and then, trying to figure out what they can do when they get out of here. In a way, we have to evaluate the personality and the situation. But one of the things that people generally feel is that the school is obligated to provide them with work, with a job. The school said it would better their lives when they came in, and their understanding of betterment is that the school would take the responsibility of finding them work and getting them into it. Whereas betterment as we understand it means having a chance to learn to read and write and become a more educated person.
15. I have a student here who I asked if he wanted to say anything and he said he'd like to say something to you, so I'll translate it for you in a minute. *Student speaks Spanish*. He says that he's very thankful that I came and that he hadn't ever learned to use a cane before. He said he's learned a little bit, not too much but a little bit, and he sends his remembrances, and hopes that he will get to know you sometime.