

“I’ve Got the Joy! Joy! Joy! Joy! Down in My Heart!”

by Olivia Phelps

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. --Galatians 5:22–23 (NIV)



I encounter the fruit of the Spirit every day here in the Borderlands. With the people I meet on the street, my fellow Young Adult Volunteers (YAVs), and the communities of Frontera de Cristo (FDC) and First Presbyterian Church of Douglas, there is an abundance of love, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness present. But when I reflect on where I most clearly witness the fruits of the Spirit as a Borderlands YAV, I instantly think of the joy I experience with the children I work with through FDC’s Children’s Enrichment Ministry.

Each day I spend at one of the enrichment centers, regardless of which one where I am teaching English, I am immediately greeted by children running up to give me hugs, shouting, “Teacher! Teacher! ¿Cómo estás?” While some days I feel discouraged before going into work, I never fail to find joy in each hug and quick conversation before the children run off to find their best friend or invite me to play a game before class starts.

While walking home from work today, one of my students from a different enrichment center was riding his bike outside his house when he noticed me. We both found joy in running into each other and discovering we had been neighbors for the last few months without ever realizing it. I found joy when he continued to slowly bike alongside me for the rest of my walk home, telling me everything that had happened since I last saw him yesterday; and he found joy in meeting our favorite stray dog, who stays outside the apartment.



Many of the children and I find joy in spending time coloring together. They love when I bring coloring sheets that include English and Spanish vocabulary for class, and it’s easy to have conversations about school or friends while we color. Additionally, almost all of the children have mastered their colors in English, and watching them take so much pride as they show me the vocabulary they know brings me so much joy.



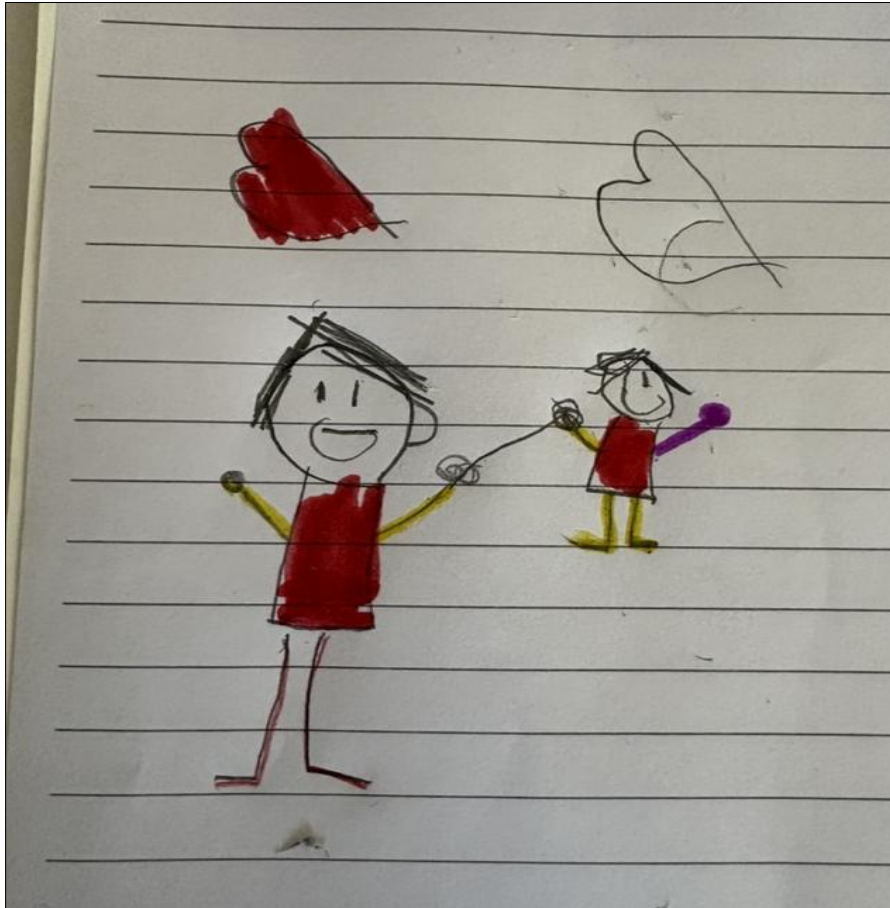
Recently, after the Super Bowl, many of our coloring conversations have included Bad Bunny. So many of them came into class the following week excited to tell me they watched part of an American football game, and we agreed the halftime show was better in the end. When they learned that I also like his music and experienced the joy of watching the Super Bowl and the performance with

my friends, they asked me my favorite songs and if I could play some of them on my phone (it was like I instantly became ten times cooler to all of them). They expressed joy in knowing we shared those common interests and that we had a special opportunity to appreciate one another's culture, one that will always stand out as part of my YAV experience.

Another recent moment in which I found particular joy was accompanying some of the children from one of the centers on a field trip to a nearby ranch. We shared a beautiful afternoon outside, discovering the ranch and its wildlife, having a picnic, playing volleyball and double dutch, and listening to everyone's laughter echo off the border wall that stood less than a mile away. I witnessed the staff at the ranch finding joy in interacting with the kids I am fortunate enough to see every week. I also witnessed the kids sharing a moment of joy as they pretended to be asleep on the bus as a joke on the immigration agents who came onboard at a checkpoint. Spending the afternoon in such an extraordinary environment, with the children not having to worry about homework or me teaching a class that day, made it a truly joyous time.



But most joy comes from the small moments that occur daily. Joy in watching the children engaged in class and curious to learn more English and about the culture in the United States. Joy in being outside on the swingset, playing hide-and-seek, or listening to the children laugh at how bad my soccer skills are. Joy in every moment I spend sitting with the girls during lunch, talking about our new favorite TikTok trends. Joy and appreciation when they feel safe enough to be vulnerable and share stories about what they experience at school or at home. Joy in every moment I am blessed to spend with these children, and in this sacred place. □



Please enjoy a few of my favorite drawings that my students have done of me, including a replica of our YAV Halloween picture. And won't you join us in singing?

1 I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart;
I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart to stay.

2 I've got the peace that passeth understanding,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart;
I've got the peace that passeth understanding,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart to stay.

3 I've got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart;
I've got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart to stay.

4 For there is therefore now no condemnation,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart;
For there is therefore now no condemnation,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart to stay.