



# Scholarships for broken souls

By Isis Miranda

One day in May of 2011 I decided going to the Scholarship Department at the university to apply for a scholarship, even knowing that my grades were not a thing to brag about. After waiting for a while at the front desk I was welcome for the coordinator, she took my student identification and checked my grades in her computer, by that time I was already regretting to be there because I knew what was going to be the answer, she looked at me and told me with arrogance that I was not qualified to get a scholarship and continued: "The scholarships are given to the best students, I mean, scholarships are hard earned, you need a 91 to be a candidate for a scholarship, so we cannot give you one with that 75 (in a burlesque tone)". She continued talking but I don't remember what else she said because my mind submerged in my memories about Father Thomas, he never requested good grades to any student to give a scholarship, for him what it was really important, as he used to say in his homilies, "understand the context", assimilate what we have learned to put it into the practice in our lives and cause a change in our person from there.

Being a person living in the most violent areas and having limited resources was enough to give a scholarship for a student. If someone failed their school year, in other institutions the usual procedure would be withdraw the scholarship immediately, but Fr. Tom used to send the student to repeat the school grade and watched his achievement every certain time. Of course, there was scolding, we had to listen to him angry and screaming for a while, but at the end, he always ended the sermon asking in a soft voice: "How much does your tuition cost?". And when he felt that we were in need to clear our mind, he would take us to eat out, or to symposia, trips, conferences, exhibitions, etc., he would talk long and deeply in his desire to "reprogram our mind" and/or encourage us.

Now after years I have understood that there were not strict requirements because the main goal of those scholarships was to give sense to the life of vulnerable souls, souls beaten by abandonment or discrimination, hurt and looking for love or attention, souls in adults roles...all of them were broken souls. No doubt father Tom understood that it was not easy for these students to concentrate on school task when they were facing at the same time real problems.

In order of solving the problem with failed classes and school dropout he created the tutoring program, but -who ran this program? The same students with shameful grades like mine, the same ones who misbehaved during Mass, the ex-gangsters... we were the same ones because first there was no one else who wanted to do it and second because in the process of rebuilding those broken souls, needs arose, needs to create leadership, responsibility, self-confidence, and motivation. It was also a process of self-discovery of one's own talents. Then? Scholarships for good students? – No, it was scholarships for broken souls trying to be good students, fighting daily all kind of battles. But was it worth? -Yes!! I find the



answer to this question when I listen to the Gospel about “the parable of the Sower”. I used to think about Caminando por la Paz, all who collaborate with this mission we are all seeders trying to cultivate in a land with stony areas and thorns, but also with fertile ones. So, no matter how many seeds were lost or did not bear fruit, we have deep faith that more than one would fall on fertile ground and bear fruit up to a hundred times more.

In this time of pandemic, our students have overcome many obstacles with their school year, especially because virtuality was not something they were used to or prepared to. We have had students who failed in some of their classes but recovered it along the year and others who did not make it and failed their school year. Our plan is continue supporting, motivating, and believing them as Fr. Thomas did with us.

Thank you very much to our friends and sponsors to keep sowing and cultivating fruits with us.

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!*

*Asociación Misioneros Caminando por la Paz- Guatemala*

