

Happy Independence!

That's what we're all saying here, as Grenada celebrates it's 48th anniversary of Independence tomorrow.

(That means there's no school tomorrow :-)

It has been a hectic month. We've had a covid spike in Grenada in January, although it has not been as deadly as the spike we had in Aug-Sept. It has affected us, however. So far we've had 4 teachers test positive for covid during January. First 2 were out, then another 2 were out. I had another teacher with a non-covid 2-week sick leave, so we were critically short staffed. We had to close down the preschool for a couple of weeks and ask the parents to keep the children home. I'm hoping that I will get the last 2 teachers back to work this coming week.

Besides the teachers, we've had 8 students test positive, that I'm aware of. When we have a known positive case that was in school, we have to close down the class for a couple of days so that everyone in the class can be tested, and then they can return to school when they have a negative result. (I also had to be tested because of the number of cases that we had had, but I tested negative.) Many of the parents are using home tests, which are available at the pharmacy.

Some of the classes have been operating at about 50% attendance. This is partly due to parents who are still afraid to send their child to school, waiting for the number of new daily cases to drop before sending them out again. The kindergarten class is an exception, with about 90% in attendance. So it is a real challenge to try to keep all the students on track academically under these conditions. It has been very hard on the first graders, as this is when they usually start to read. There has not been the consistency in their time in school (starting with the delayed opening to the school year, when they were not allowed back in school until November). Although we had online classes during Sept. & Oct., it is not at all as effective as the in-person learning in school - especially for the younger students.

So it's been a very hectic and stressful January.

Last Friday was "National Colors Day", where the students dress up in national colors, rather than their regular school uniform. We also gave the students an "Independence treat", which was a slice of pizza and a penacool (like frozen popsicle). Since I was substituting for one of the teachers who was out with covid, it was non-stop action to also coordinate those activities, answer the phone, which kept ringing (no one else available to answer it right now), and do my regular principal duties. (You can see some pictures of the students in their national colors at our fb page: [facebook.com/BCAGrenada](https://www.facebook.com/BCAGrenada))

Cruise ships are regularly coming to Grenada again, for the first time in almost 2 years. (They stopped them from coming in March of 2020. They started coming again in December.) They keep them in a bubble, so we mostly see them going by in covid-approved busses to the different tourist attractions.

We do also have some stayover visitors, it seems mostly from the UK, so the tourism industry is recovering to some extent. (CDC has advised Americans not to visit Grenada because of our current high infection rate.)

Reuben is currently without health insurance, because the rate went up about 50% when he turned 65. We simply couldn't afford to pay the new higher rate. Susan was renewed on the policy, as she wasn't hit with the same increase. (This, in spite of the fact that I've had no insurance claims for the past 17 years.) We are exploring other options, some of which include insurance that does not cover anything in the USA. I've also been trying to enroll in the Medicare, but have been unable to get through to do so, after months of trying. Since we live overseas, we are required to enroll through an office in the Dominican Republic, and cannot do it through a U.S. based office. The social security office in the D.R. has only about 6 hours per week when you are allowed to call, but so far, they have yet to answer the phone during those designated times, even though I have been trying for months, and spent hours on hold. They also have not responded in any way to the emails we have sent, even though we sent them to the required email address. We will try to see if the local U.S. embassy in Grenada can help us in any way. I understand that occasionally they might have someone visit Grenada who would be able to help us get enrolled. (We also have tried to enroll online, but it gets to a certain point, and then tells us that we can't enroll online, for some unexplained reason.) Susan will need to enroll later this year (Oct-Dec period), so we hope we can get somewhere by that time. We know it would be very simple to do if we lived in the USA. (I called social security in the USA. They answered right away and were very pleasant and helpful. But they told me only the office in the D.R. could help me.)

So this would be the main prayer request at this time: some solution to the insurance need, including getting enrolled in Medicare.

On the plus side, we've had no snow so far this winter :-)

In Grenada,

Reuben & Susan Mains