

# Student teaching took her far from home



(Staff Photo by Mark Workman)

**BACKSTRAP WEAVING** is a memento that Cheryl Potter of Moleley Lane brought with her from her student teaching term at the American School in Guatemala City. "I wanted to bring back something else besides posters—like a skill," she said. She learned the technique from an Indian artisan after school.

By JUDY WILDMAN  
Daily News Staff Writer

"And tell me, Miss Potter, where did you do your student teaching?"  
"Colegio Americano de Guatemala."

A school administrator interviewing prospective teacher Cheryl Potter probably would do a double-take at the Warren County woman's response.

The May graduate of Western Kentucky University got her chalkboard training this spring in Guatemala City, where she taught English, reading and

social studies to kindergarten and second graders.

Her view, therefore, of the Central American city of 1 million is more than that of a tourist. And her memories translate into work experience.

Bilingual education is one of the main emphases of the American School in Guatemala City, which is interested in bilingual education from its elementary and most impressive stage.

"They're pretty smart. I wish I had started out bilingual," Miss Potter

said. Two days a week after school she worked with a tutor on her Spanish, pulling her high school verb conjugations and one college semester's training out of file into active use again.

She practiced at school, on the bus and in the marketplace, where she became a popular companion for other Americans at the school.

"They'd say, 'Let's let Cheryl do it. She'll get a good deal,'" Miss Potter said. The artisans enjoy a spirited bargaining session, she said.

Miss Potter has a heavy woven blanket and a table linen set to show for her bargaining skills. She returned home to Moleley Lane with the usual tourist's array of posters, photographs and prints and with a particularly useful souvenir.

"I wanted to bring something else besides posters—like a skill," Miss Potter said.

So, on days when she did not have Spanish lessons after school, she worked with an Indian woman on backstrap weaving.

The technique is so named because of the apparatus that functions as

the loom. The brilliantly colored threads are stretched over dowels hand-chiseled by the artisan's husband. The weaver loops one end of the frame around a tree limb and straps the other end around her back, pulling the artwork in front of her.

At home in Warren County, Miss Potter can continue the craft by substituting a wall book for the tree limb.

Another favorite souvenir was a surprise gift from her students on her last day at the school. When she boarded the airplane home, a lapful of some 50 cards kept her entertained. "They wrote things like, 'I hope the children in Kentucky are good to you,'" she said.

Her student teaching in Guatemala, in addition to peeling to pieces up, she said, "I learned to be more flexible," she said.

Under the elementary Although she took with her

education major had other career fringe benefits. "A lot of people said, 'Why are you going to do your student teaching in Guatemala?'" Miss Potter said. A love for travel and the chance to live inexpensively with a Guatemalan family made it an opportunity too appealing to pass up, she said.

"I learned to be more flexible," she said. Although she took with her

many teaching materials, she did not have the array that would have been available in the United States. Her inventiveness became an asset.

"One of my supervisors in Kentucky said that's one mark of a good teacher," Miss Potter said. "It was with mixed emotions that she returned to Bowling Green and left behind her new students and her extended family.

She had been the eighth Western student to live with the family of Jose Duran, a retired U.S. embassy worker.

The Guatemalan family and others she toured with on weekends gave her an expanded view of a phrase she had considered applicable only to the United States.

"...you've heard of Southern hospitality. There, it's true."





WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

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Department of Teacher Education

Dear Cheryl,

I was very pleased to receive your letter. It sounds as if you're having a great time and learning many new things from your experiences.

I can certainly understand that living away from home in a foreign country and student teaching altogether would be very challenging.

Your classroom experiences that you describe sound both exciting and rewarding. Do not apologize for getting "carried away" in your letter. I really enjoy hearing about all of your adventures.

I am very pleased with your enthusiasm and look forward to hearing from you again.

Sincerely,

*Ruth Cornelius*  
Ruth Cornelius