



One Word Can Change a Relationship

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Many years ago I worked in a church in Saskatoon. A man from the Philippines set up an affiliate congregation and I soon came to love the people. The only word that I ever learned in Tagalog, which is the language that they spoke, was "Mabuhay". I first saw it on a sign that the group was taking to the airport to welcome their new immigrant friends.

The literal translation of this word is "long live" or "be alive" but it is often used as a greeting such as "welcome here".

It is surprising how many times in the past twenty-five years that I have met someone from the Philippines and said "Mabuhay". Immediately all barriers are dropped and a huge smile erupts on the face of the individual.

Once, when I was working in a high school I was asked to meet with a new student who had not communicated with the personnel or classmates. He had apparently been sitting silently in his desk with his head down for days. He did not talk and did not participate in the activities around him.

When he came to my office he repeated this behavior. His hands were buried deep in his pockets and his head, which was partially camouflaged in a hoodie was bowed. At first I thought he was Metis or Native but when I asked his ethnicity he said he was Filipino.

It felt like a miracle when I immediately said "mabuhay". He raised his head, smiled and all lines of communication were open. When I asked for this story he explained that his grandfather had died and he was not allowed to attend the funeral four days previous to this. Well, that explained a lot!

Today I entered the kitchen during a break from training held for oil sand camp workers. One man sat apart from the other men who were eating their lunch. I asked if he would like some of the water that I had boiled for tea and he politely but quietly said "No thanks". When I asked where he called home, he said the Philippines.

Well, you know what comes next. He had just taken a drink from his cup when I said "Mabuhay". He started to choke, broke into a smile and said "You must have friends". We then had a great conversation about his country and the transition to the northern Alberta winters here which can drop to 40 degrees below zero.

I am so thankful that I learned that word "Mabuhay" and truly wish that I had a vocabulary that included a powerful greeting for each of the 260 countries of the world.

Imagine what a difference we could make if each of us had the ability to connect with others immediately by using one very special word that has meaning for them.

Sometimes it only takes one, two or three words to change the direction in a conversation, meeting or relationship. Words like "Thanks", "I'm sorry" or "I love you" can bring people together. And doesn't the world need that right now? Especially when there is so much division and fighting and hurt?

Let's make a commitment to do our best to build strong bridges of peace and kindness between others - one word at a time; one person at a time.

Mabuhay!