

5/28/95 Sunday

We arrived Monday night 5/22 after 3 planes---San Diego, Dallas, Miami, Quito. Highlights included Mark freaking out at a poor young

woman who seemed slow to change seats so we could have 4 across;

Miri spilling her juice and refusing to wipe it up because she didn't want to dirty her hands; (I had a sleeping Ana on my lap and was unable to reach her.) Eating takeout Mexican as we ambled down

the jetway in Dallas.

We arrived in Quito about 10 p.m. local time, and it wasn't even raining as it has been almost every afternoon since. After standing in line for about 15 minutes a 20 year old customs official came and

asked Senora Alison and the children to follow him. To our

delighted surprise we were escorted to the head of the line and

granted our highly prized 1 year visas --- stamp,stamp,stamp,stamp.

Our 11 pieces of luggage including my 70 lb. video trunk arrived quickly and undamaged and I mostly avoided running over innocent bystanders with my overloaded luggage cart so graciously provided "gratis" by the Quito Airport Authorities. Our roll continued. The

customs senora advised Miri not to push the inspection lottery button; she secured a porter and all our belongings were efficiently escorted to the street without even a cursory inspection. There-- "que milagro"---Luis met us with a sign inscribed "Alison Brysk" and loaded our bags and our exhausted bodies into his mini-van.

Luis drove directly through the deserted streets of Quito and parked directly in front of our quaint British owned hostel the Cafe Cultura. We spent the next 20 minutes ringing the bell and waiting to be admitted. (Miri suggested that we get back in the van and drive around looking for a phone.) Finally Luis discovered the gate was open, and we were able to deposit ourselves and our baggage in

the deserted hotel. The only sign of human occupation was a homemade ladder and the smell of fresh painting in progress. Tired

and desperate I discovered our room number and the key and searched

out our quarters. Miri while staggering around the lobby, unfortunately fell on her face--the bad news. The good news was that there was no permanent damage and her shrieks and cries woke

Juan Carlos aka the bear from his hibernation long enough to help carry our bags down the hall, past the dining room, outside and up the stairs. Although we had three beds in two rooms, plus a private bath, there was no room to walk, suitcases were piled on beds, and we whatever we were looking for was always in one of the other dozen pieces of luggage.

Thanks to the wonders of email and networking on the internet, and especially due to Alison and Layne's diligence we moved into our 2 1/2 bedroom apartment 3 days later. We've spent the next 3 days establishing our infrastructure ---hot water and ovens, washers and clotheslines (how do they work?), the fruit market, the stationery store, the supermarket, the adventures of searching out and buying a \$16 high chair---and deciding to carry it home a half hour walk.

Today, Sunday, it felt like we had finally arrived and that this could be a welcome home. For breakfast the kids and I walked out to the corner bakery. The friendly counter woman ----everyone we've met has been exceedingly helpful and open----gave the kids samples

of a raisin fruit bread. We brought home croissants, and cinnamon rolls, french bread and a "kaiser roll." Made tea, coffee, made selections from our bowl of tropical fruit, imported cheese, reading the paper which the "portero" faithfully delivers under our door.

Around 11 we headed out to Parque Carolina. In the elevator we met

a hacendera who was in town visiting our neighbor, her mother. We asked directions by bus, she insisted on delivering us in her chevy 4x4. (They grow asparagus and apples on her finca.)

At the park we Miri climbed boulders under a statue of a giant condor. Whole families, not to mention guitar players made the same

climb. The kids romped in the playground, watched clowns performing

street theater, checked out a puppet show, and made friends with everyone. At the Corfu---an upscale heladoria we stuffed ourselves

with ice cream---tropical flavors, fresh fruit, not to mention chocolate sodas. A 10 minute 40 cent bus ride brought all of us home.

Alison bathed the girls, and I decided to test my kitchen skills. (These now include boiling water for 30 minutes before using it to wash all our vegetables.) The menu Chilean wine, red sauce and noodles---the market ladies sell the onions and garlic bagged and peeled, baked chicken, fresh peas, and an artichoke that took 2 1/2 hours to cook at our 10,000' altitude.

After dinner Miri decided to practice her Spanish. She's spent most of her time her drawing and painting like she did in Claremont. She already like to place the occasional request in Spanish in restaurants. Tonight she mastered the names of colors and the numbers from 1 -10. But the most fun was playing restaurant with her. She spoke English and was the waiter. Alison and I were Spanish speaking customers. She had the entire scene down and cracked us up. She told Alison that although there were 10 french fries Alison could only have five. Another customer had called ahead and needed 1/2 of them. After elaborate discussions of my order of baked chicken, she insisted on bringing me fish. When we asked where our food was, she said she had to help the cook fix his bicycle and would serve us as fast as she could. When I asked for milk, she said she could bring me coffee and milk, but not milk

without coffee. We were in stitches.

And Ana gives us many a laugh too. Sometimes I think she understands more Spanish than Miri. And I can often get a rise out of her by switching to Castellano. The wooden floor is quite slippery and she toddles around like a drunk skater at times. She and Miri roll around like monkeys and are quite attached to one another.

Alison is in bed, depressed by Time magazine and reports of America. I feel liberated to be away from LA. Tomorrow it's back to errands---and a follow up call to the Fulbright Commission where our landlady reports her daughter has word of a job teaching English to some Ecuadorian ministry.

(Not to overlook that last Thursday there was a general strike with much indigenous participation. The papers are full of reports and Alison is collecting the grist....)

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Continue to spend much of our time creating infrastructure. We've just hired a full time housekeeper. The going rate is \$80 a month or about .55 an hour US, plus social security of about \$6.00 per month. Theresa will clean, wash, cook and watch the kids occasionally. There is a tremendous disparity between "middle class" Ecuadorinas who live as well as better as middle class US and the poor majority. The newspaper is full of stories about strikes of court workers, and of doctors at public hospitals, of areas (Esmeraldas) with 90% illiteracy and 40% non-Spanish speakers with river worms which cause blindness, of raising the cost of lights and telephones (64,000 lines may be shut off in Guayaquil for nonpayment) in order to pay the costs of the border war with Peru.

Meanwhile I'm negotiating with the Fulbright Commission to teach an

Intermediate English class for the Ecuadorian Foreign Ministry.

They'll decide tomorrow whether to hire me, and perhaps be willing

to tell me the salary, which nobody has yet mentioned. My fantasy is that they need a "man of a certain age" to command the attention of los funcionarios. We'll see. The job would be 10 hours a week

from 7-9 am!!

[I turned it down----they wanted me to start at 7:30 am for \$6 an hour.]