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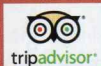


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- 6** PUBLISHER'S LETTER
- 8** COVER STORY - Relocation Services of Ecuador: Offering Expats Peace of Mind for Six Years
- 12** COMMUNITY - Miss Cuenca Beyond the Beauty
- 14** BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT - Hostal Casa Izkun: Mi Casa Es Su Casa
- 18** MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS - The Barlows
- 20** EXPAT PROFILE - Neil Mailer
- 22** HOLIDAY TRADITIONS - A Cuenca Christmas and New Year
- 24** BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT - All Things Alpaca Ecuador: Crafted in Ecuador from the Finest Alpaca Fiber
- 26** DATE NIGHT - Jim and Kara Shea Davis
- 28** FRIENDLY FACES
- 30** PARTING THOUGHTS - Reflections on Thanksgiving



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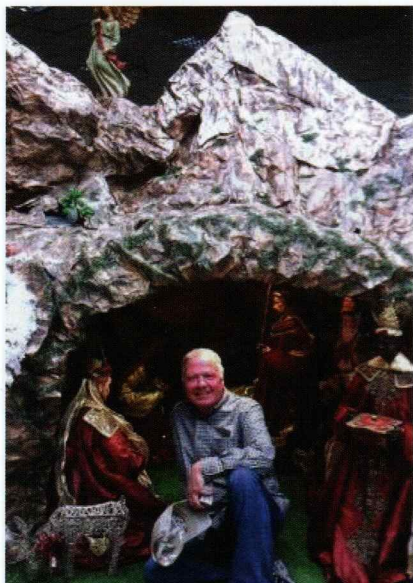
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A couple of months before I moved to Cuenca, I made a list of goals I wanted to accomplish during my first 5 years of retirement.

There was the "losing weight" goal, and the "learning to speak Spanish" goal. But the "travel more" goal was the one I was looking forward to the

most. And now it looks like I will be traveling at least 3 or 4 times a year.

Do you want to come along with me?

Cuenca Expats Magazine and I have been working with friends who are in the travel and tour industry, and have come up with some great destinations. We want to start these travel adventures with a few day-trips, and if there is enough interest, we plan to expand to a couple of overnight trips, and then maybe week-long adventures. There is so much to see and do right here in Ecuador, like the Amazon and the Galapagos. There are also great and affordable destinations like Peru and Colombia that are within our reach. What about 5 days of eating, dancing, and shopping in Miami? Anything is possible and we could do it together.

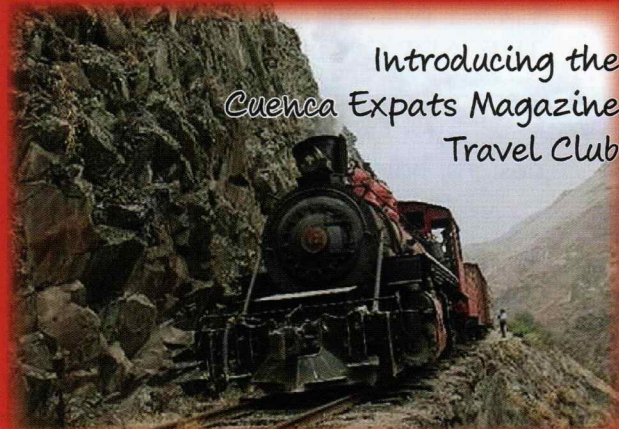
And as a group, we can do it safely, with comfortable accommodations, and on a budget.

So, who wants to go for a train ride?

Our first day trip will be a true adventure: The Devil's Nose Train Ride and the Inca Ruins, Ingapirca. I have wanted to do this trip for a long time.

Mark your calendars: Monday, February 8th. I will be there passing out my famous chocolate chip cookies and helping out in any way I can. See details in sidebar. I promise that you will have a great time. And if you are scared of trains, you can sit next to me. I will hug you and keep you safe.

George



Introducing the
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Travel Club

February 8, 2016
Departure Time TBA

Devil's Nose Train Ride & Ingapirca

If you're like me, I've been wanting to go on this exciting train ride and explore the best preserved of all Incan ruins in Ecuador. Good news - we can do both in one day if we leave early.

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Yours truly, Ecuador George, will be the Travel Club host to insure everyone has a great time.

Nariz del Diablo (Devil's Nose Train)

A tourist destination like no other, Nariz del Diablo "Devil's Nose" is not for the faint of heart. Dubbed "the most difficult railway in the world," step into the rehabilitated, zig-zag railroad of Ecuador's first train, made to connect the Coast with the capital of Quito. It was built in a near vertical wall of rock standing at 1,900 meters high and was finally completed in 1908.

Ingapirca

Journey into the place where Ecuador's past comes alive. Inside the ruins of Ingapirca, located in the province of Cañar, you will find Ecuador's largest and most preserved archeological site. The glorious sun temple and village structures with stonework identical to that found in Machu Picchu, will leave you enchanted. Built as an observatory and ceremonial site for the Cañari culture, today it's a treat for tourists, hikers and grazing llamas.

With limited seating, if you want to go on this new adventure, email me at travelclubinfo@cuencaexpatsmagazine.com and I'll reserve you a spot and send you all the details.

I trust you're as excited about this Travel Club as I am. See you soon.



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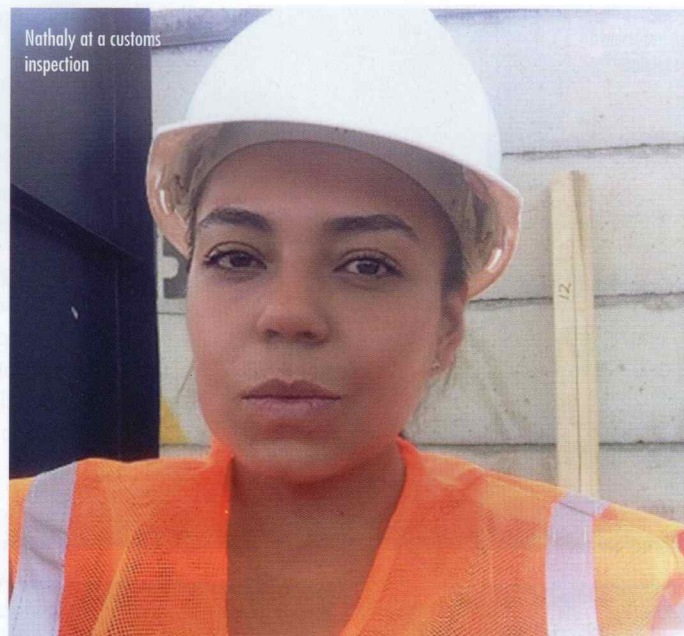
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Relocation Services of Ecuador

Offering Expats Peace of Mind for Six Years

By Sherry B. Johnson





When you consider living in Ecuador, there are many factors to take into consideration: climate, housing, culture and transportation. Not just the mode of transportation to get you to the country, or for you to get around once you arrive, but shipping your personal belongings so you can have the comforts of home while living abroad.

There are many people who attempt to ship their personal belongings into the country themselves, but quickly learn that while you may save a few dollars on the front end, you could find yourself paying thousands of dollars on the back end dealing with issues you weren't aware of when it arrives in port. Hiring a reputable company with the knowledge, expertise and contacts, who does it day in and day out and understands customs laws, is a far better way to go.

Paul Wilches is 5th generation Ecuadorian, born in Cuenca. He attended school at Rafael Borja, a traditional catholic school for elementary and high school. Paul spent his senior year learning about US culture as an exchange student in Michigan, graduating from Ishpeming High School in 1990. Paul returned to Ecuador and graduated from the Universidad del Azuay with a degree in Hotel Management and Tourism in 1994. Paul married Cuencana, Karina Serrano, in 1996, and they have a son, Paul Andres, who is 19 years old.

He has been in the import/export business his entire life. The third generation to work in his family's 70 year old tannery business, as Sales Manager he acted as Import and Export director. Over 70% of their production was exported to Peru, Columbia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Spain and the US, so he understands the intricacies of the customs process.

In 2009 his parents purchased an investment property, and Paul managed it for them, renting it to an American couple from Texas. When he found out they needed help getting their household goods from Texas to Ecuador, he walked them through it. They were so pleased, they told their friends about it and he soon had people calling him for help with their shipping needs. Paul realized with the growing number of Expats from many countries coming to Ecuador there was a

need for someone to help them successfully ship their personal items into the country, so he left the family business and founded Relocation Services of Ecuador.

Since November 2009, Paul and his team have successfully shipped over 350 containers into Ecuador. They average between 5 and 6 containers each month. When you consider they manage the process from start to finish, that's a lot of paperwork (from your home in the USA to your door anywhere in Ecuador) !

Estefania Nathaly Consuegra (Nathaly) joined the company in 2010. In 2013, she was presented with two exciting opportunities – to go to Spain to get her MBA or stay in Cuenca and purchase 50% of the shares of Relocation Services of Ecuador and become Paul's business partner. She chose well and loves the challenge of being an owner and general manager, considering it the greatest experience of her life. Nathaly lives with her baby, a shitzu named Princesa. In her spare time, she enjoys a glass of red wine with a good book and spending time with friends in the beautiful city she calls home.

From the first inquiry by phone they help you understand the process, and walk you through each step so that there are no surprises along the way. Paul insists on having a conversation with every potential client, so they understand the scope of the project and he can get a clear idea of what they are looking for and advise them on their best course of action.

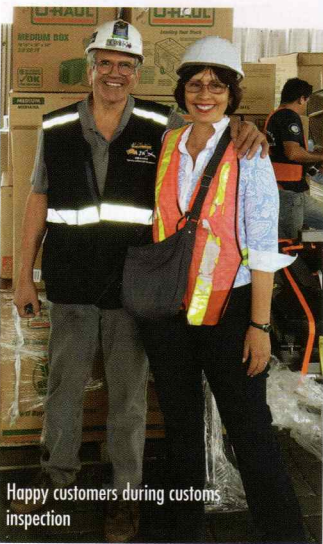
One of the first things that Paul explains is that they must have a VISA before they are allowed to ship anything into the country. You have to be a legal resident of Ecuador and have all your paperwork in hand before you begin the process. This is a very important first step and many people don't realize this when they start the process.

Once you have all the proper documentation, Paul helps you determine the appropriate size container for your household goods. There are three sizes for containers:

20' container – 8' wide x 8' high x 20' long - fits the contents of a two bedroom apartment.



A just-opened container



Happy customers during customs inspection



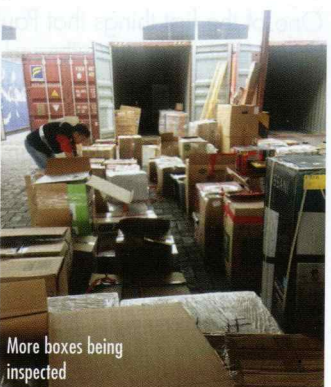
Numbered boxes lined up for inspection



Customs inspection pathway



Boxes being inspected



More boxes being inspected

40' container – 8' wide x 8' high x 40' long - fits the contents of an average three bedroom home.

40' HC container – 8' wide x 9' high x 40' long - is the largest container offered, and it's the exact same price as a 40' standard container to ship.

Many people think that everything you own can come with you. That is not always the case and Paul carefully details all of this in his communications with potential clients.

"We don't leave the office at the end of the day until every question has been answered satisfactorily for our customers. We pride ourselves on our communication. We push ourselves to offer the highest level of customer service to our clients."

If you are thinking about shipping a container of goods to Ecuador, first and foremost it's a good idea to understand what you are NOT allowed to bring with you.

1. Firearms, explosives or munitions of any kind – it will be considered contraband and could lead to a jail sentence.
2. No motorized vehicles, cars, motorcycles, scooters, golf carts, jet skis, etc.
3. No more than 10 bottles of liquor
4. No regular filament lightbulbs
5. No cash, gold or silver bars, etc. – all of this must be brought in through the proper channels
6. Food stuffs – you can pack your leftovers (what would normally constitute the contents of a pantry) but you can't bring 40 cases of baked beans, for example.

Everything in your home is considered used for the purpose of customs, so you are allowed to bring all of your items with you, other than those listed above. If you consider it room by room – you can bring all of your kitchen appliances – both large and small, washer and dryer, furniture, rugs, art, décor, and tools that can be proven are for personal use only, including solar panels, small hydro electric generators, table saws, etc. You are allowed up to 440 pounds of clothing per person – which includes shoes and hats. You are also allowed to bring one TV per person living in your home.

While Paul can help you with 99% of the process, the part that is up to you, and is the most important task, is providing a detailed inventory for every box in the container. Unlike U-Haul, where you load a box and put it on the truck marked kitchen, in an overseas shipment you must have a detailed manifest of everything in the container. Each box, piece of furniture, rug, or loose item must be numbered, and the contents listed appropriately.

EXAMPLE: Let's say you are packing your kitchen – Box 1 might have your dishes in it so you would put on the manifest: BOX 1 – Place setting for 12 (48 pieces) and 2 serving platters – not just "Dishes." If it was your silverware, it might read - BOX 1: 50 pieces of flatware, 20 kitchen utensils. Clothing is similar – you pack Box 49 detail it on the manifest – BOX 49: 10 woman's shirts, 7 men's pants, 14 ties, and 6 woman's sweaters – not just "clothes." You get the gist – it's better to list everything than be too vague and have issues going through customs.

To assist in making this process as painless as possible,

Relocation Services of Ecuador provides a detailed inventory spreadsheet that you can use.

Once you have finished packing, labeling and detailing everything on the manifest, the process is quite simple. The appropriate sized container is delivered to your home and you have four hours to load it with all your belongings, either personally or by hiring local movers to pack it for you. The container is then picked up and delivered to the closest US port, where it is x-rayed by US Customs and loaded on the ship.

Once the container arrives in Guayaquil, Paul or Nathaly personally travel to Guayaquil to open and inspect the contents. Customs requires a pathway be made through the container all the way to the back so that they can see everything inside. The boxes that are unloaded are opened and checked against the manifest to make sure there is nothing in them that was not declared. If they find anything that isn't listed, they may demand to open every box, which may delay the delivery of your container and could cost you in fines and storage fees while it is sorted out.

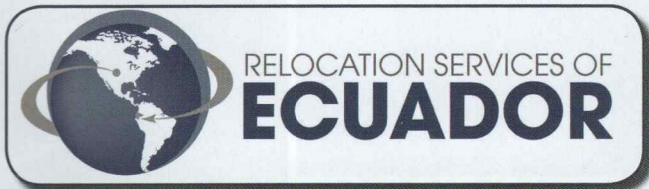
Once the container has been processed and approved by customs, it is loaded on a trailer and delivered to your final destination, wherever that may be in Ecuador. Paul and Nathaly have delivered containers all over the country including Cuenca, Quito, Salinas, Vilcabamba, Cotacachi, Loja, Olon, Puerto Lopez, Puerto Cayo, Santa Marianita, Manta, Crucita, Jama and even the Amazon. They have a team on this end that will unload your container for you, a personal service that is included as part of the package.

Many people might think that shipping a container is too expensive and they look at replacing all of their household items once they get here, but check out the comparison chart above which shows the average cost of an appliance in the US vs. buying it new in Ecuador.

APPLIANCE	US PRICE (avg)	ECUADOR PRICE (avg)
Refrigerator	\$1,800	\$5,300
Washer	600	1,400
Dryer	700	1,500
Dishwasher	500	2,000 <small>(imported, not manufactured in EC)</small>
46" TV	500	1300
TOTAL	4,100	11,500

As you can see, just in the cost of replacing five major appliances, you could have brought a 20' container to Ecuador with all of your belongings. Another consideration is that furniture made in Ecuador is made for Ecuadorian sized people, and can be uncomfortable for average Americans, unless you have it custom made which can be expensive.

Using a professional company that understands importing and knows the customs process will make your life a whole lot easier, and save you money in the long run. Once you have decided to ship your treasured belongings to Ecuador, put your mind at ease by hiring the company that has successfully shipped more containers than anyone else, Relocation Services of Ecuador.



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Testimonials

"I highly recommend Paul Wilches, President of Relocation Services of Ecuador. We used his services to move a 40' container from California, USA, to Cuenca Ecuador last month. He and his partner, Nathaly Consuegra exceeded our expectations on every aspect of our shipment. They handled everything at a very competitive price with no surprises or extra charges. Our things arrived in less than 30 days." – Alice

"From the beginning of my relocation process to Ecuador to the day my container was delivered to my new home, I could not have been happier with the very professional assistance provided by Relocation Services. Frankly, I would have been lost without them. I have heard very scary reports about other companies. Everything happened exactly as they told me it would and {they} were with me every step of the way." – Laura

I am a retired business consultant. I was very impressed with the professionalism of Paul and Nathaly. They truly know their business. Everything was clearly explained and entered on my contract. There were no surprises... They are excellent business people and deal with everyone in a civil and business like manner. Do yourself a favor and go to Relocation Services of Ecuador and find out for yourself." - Stan



Miss Cuenca Beyond the Beauty

By Carolina Jaramillo Malo
Photos Courtesy Fundación Reinas de Cuenca

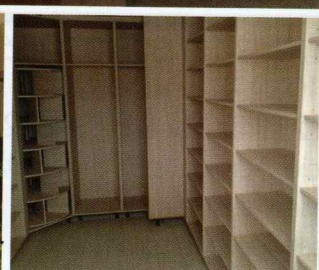
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The year was 1924, the place: a vibrant city nestled in between Andean heights called Cuenca by its Spanish settlers, and Guapondélig by the Cañari people before them. One hundred four years had passed since Cuenca had established her independence, and the renowned poets and passionate artists of this cosmopolitan city yearned for an official muse to call their own. She would embody the charisma, the timeless values, and the culture of the Cuencana people. And so, in November of 1924 Cuenca crowned her first queen, Lola Carrasco Vintimilla.

By simple subtraction, one would calculate that by today there would be a long hall strung with the pictures of 91 beauties of past and present. On the contrary, due to extended reigns of past queens, this year is only the 46th coronation, one that coincided with the 195th anniversary of Cuenca's independence, and gave way to a great fanfare of lively events. There is no doubt, Miss Cuenca is more than a beauty pageant and one night's glamorous gala. It is the beginning of a young lady's yearlong journey towards improving the lives of the less fortunate dwellers of her city.

Today, Reinas de Cuenca Foundation functions as a private, non-profit organization for the social benefit of the vulnerable people of the Cuencano population, including children, teens, adults and senior citizens, with or without disability. Since their legal status granted in 1991 by the corresponding government



agencies, the institutionalization of the Foundation has made it one of the biggest and most influential of Cuenca's charity organizations. So many years of social commitment certainly attest that Miss Cuenca is more than a crown, and the position no less than a mission. Following tradition, the lovely lady, chosen and crowned, will embark on a nonstop year of coordinating charity events, being present at important town proceedings, searching for volunteers, joining forces with public and private entities, and being at the front of this whirlwind in order to accomplish her mission.

This year, Miss Cuenca 2015-2016 is Tatiana Guillén Jaramillo, who took home the crown on the same day as her 19th birthday. The blonde and hazel eyed Cuencana stands tall and delicate in her thin frame, a worthy representative of the beauty of her city. She is currently an architecture student of the Catholic University of Cuenca, and is already hard at work to ensure her year of service is one of lasting social good. Every Miss Cuenca traditionally selects a target at which to aim her specific efforts, and this

year, Tatiana says her support will go to "all the groups of priority attention, but specifically to the children who suffer with cancer, with whom I've already worked." Currently, Miss Cuenca is already gearing up to meet the charitable demands of Christmas, with her program "Navidad Solidaria" in which supplies of food, toys and the traditional goody bags will be delivered to 14,000 children.

So much to do, so little time. But the crown that Tatiana wears has travelled far and wide to fulfill its purpose, and the end of her reign will undoubtedly yield the smiling results of the solidarity which, year after year, make Reinas de Cuenca Foundation an organization that delivers the most important kind of beauty: the beauty of the heart.



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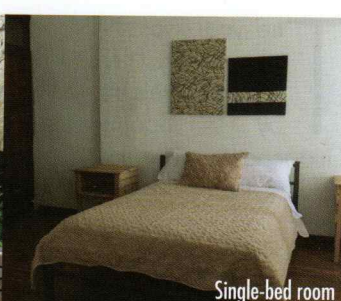
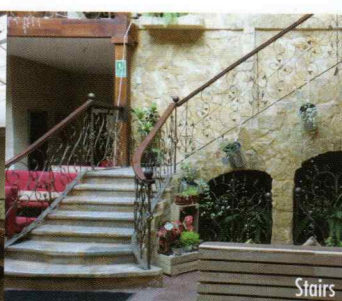
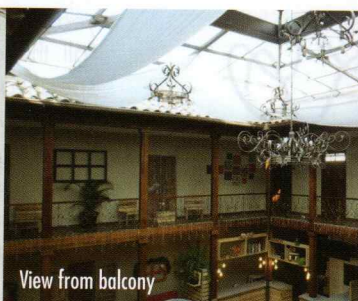
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Hostal Casa Izkun

Mi Casa Es Su Casa

By David Johnson

The secret to business success really isn't all that secret - be passionate about what you do while offering sensational service at a fair price, and treat your customers like family. Combine these common sense tenets with a strong marketing and advertising plan, and you are well on your way to building a long-term, sustainable business. These were the very ideas that Maria Morales and her daughter Alexa, who is currently working toward her degree in Marketing, had in mind when they opened the doors of Hostal Casa Izkun at the end of October and it seems to be paying off in spades as evidenced by their full occupancy during Fiestas in November. Getting to work with family members is a bonus.

"Izkun" means the number "9" in Quichua. Maria and Alexa chose the name for their hostel because the number nine plays a huge role in their family including birth dates and other important life events. Maria and her family moved back to Cuenca after living in Chicago and running a jewelry business there with her husband, Walter Iniguez. With the increase of competitors and big box stores selling jewelry, business was becoming more challenging, so the family decided to return to their native country.

When the building where Hostal Casa Izkun now resides came on the market, Maria purchased it. Initially, her plan was to start a mall of local craftspeople, but her idea evolved into starting a business that she felt was sorely lacking in Cuenca - an affordable hostel that was family-friendly, safe, beautifully decorated, and that would encourage people to relax just like they would at home.

With the help of her mother, Alicia Vasquez, who has a tremendous amount of experience in building and remodeling, Maria put her plan into motion. She wanted to incorporate as much of the original building into the new space as she could, so with that end in mind, she recycled and repurposed many of the old materials including all the doors.

On top of that, Hostal Casa Izkun offers a menu that can best be described as a combination of traditional Ecuadorian fare (comida tipica) and United States comfort food: a culinary fusion designed to remind you of a home cooked meal. Some of the delicious menu items include a salad topped with fresh strawberries, walnuts, sweet corn and kiwi, catfish stew, and trout that is raised on their family farm, run by her brother and father Mauricio and Julio Morales. They also offer a daily almuerzo with a choice of fish, chicken or beef, served with juice and dessert for \$3.50. One of the primary goals of their restaurant is to offer food that is not only delicious, but healthy as well.

When visiting Hostal Cîsa Izkun, the effort Maria and Alexa have made to make each visitor's experience warm and inviting becomes abundantly apparent. From the huge naturally lit lobby, to the spacious rooms, to the furniture made from recycled shipping pallets, every detail has been carefully thought out to offer the most pleasurable experience, whether you are staying there, dining, or just hanging out, working on your computer and drinking coffee, which they strongly encourage. One thing is for certain, Maria, Alexa and her family truly feel that their home is your home.

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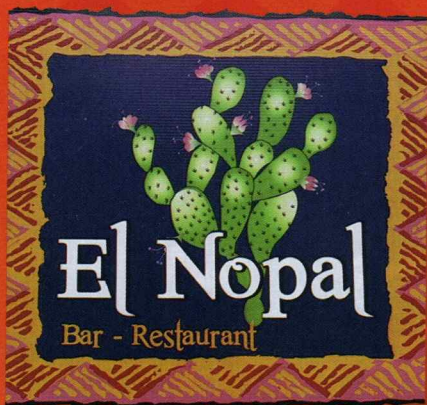
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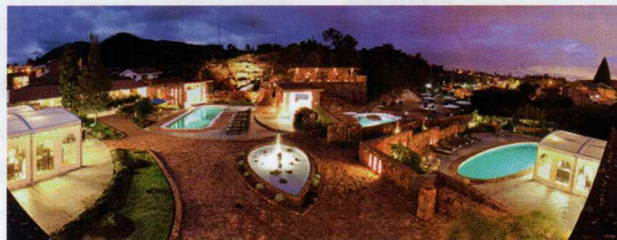
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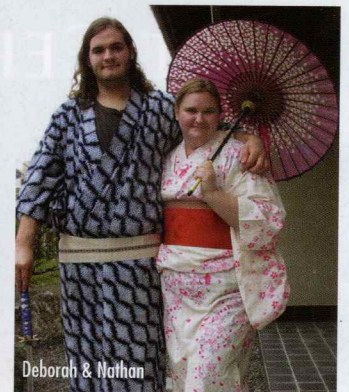
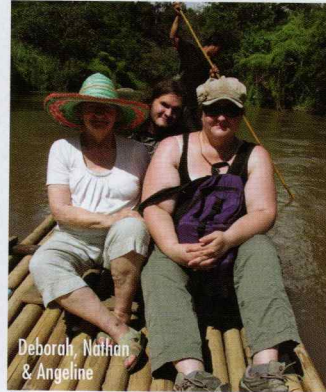
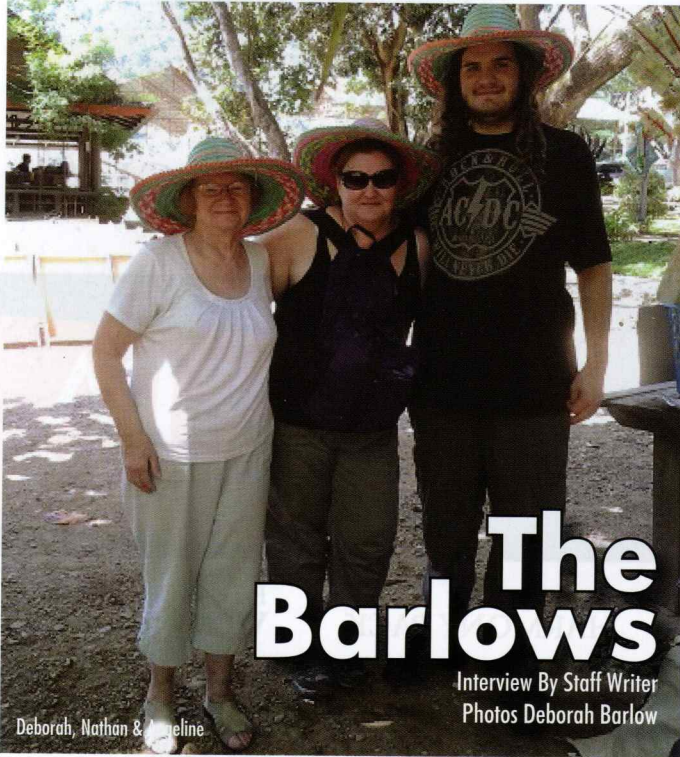
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I understand you are here with your family, can you introduce them to us?

My name is Deborah Barlow and I was originally born and raised in New Jersey and I am the youngest child of three - I have two sisters, 10 and 12 years older than me. I became a single mom, to a son named Nathan, when I was 16. After moving around quite a bit, when Nathan was 9 years old we moved to New Hampshire. In 2008, after my parents divorced, I invited my mom, Angeline Barlow, to live near us in New Hampshire. Now we all live here in Cuenca.

When did you move to Cuenca and why?

Nathan and I moved to Cuenca in August of 2012. I went to an agency that placed certified teachers around the world. He asked me where I wanted to go, I replied that since I spoke Spanish, a language that I had taken for 5 years in school, a Spanish speaking country would be nice.

Where in Cuenca do you live?

We have only lived in 2 places in the past 3.5 years. At first, we wanted to live near the center for accessibility. We had a nice furnished apartment on Remigio Crespo, but after one and a half years I was starved for grass and a lawn. We then moved in the Doce de Octubre y Don Bosco area and LOVE it. There are 4 different bus routes within just a couple of blocks. We also have a beautiful house with a massive avocado tree and a really nice yard.

What is your favorite thing to do here?

My favorite thing to do here is learning to speak Quichua. Most Saturdays you can find me in the markets surrounded by Quichua children. The language is unfortunately dying because

the children are not taught the language by their parents.

My son has been studying Japanese for quite a few years and found a Japanese teacher here. He aspires to be a chef and has created his own line of seasonings that he uses at home and he has begun to sell them.

My mom spends most of her time studying the Bible with people in English and Spanish. She also loves going to restaurants and knows practically every almuerzo in the city

What is the biggest thing you miss about the where you are from?

I don't miss anything anymore. After living in New Hampshire for a number of years I find that I did miss the snow, the quiet, the stars, and the animals. But, when I'm feeling that I need the quiet, the stars, or the animals I take a trip to Vilcabamba. That cures my nature itch, at least for a little while.

What is one thing the no one knows about you?

I always strive to keep a positive attitude and live in the here and now, looking towards the future instead of dwelling on the 'what ifs' of the past. Until I got to Ecuador I really didn't know the meaning of a close knit family. I thought I did. These past few years have shown me the importance of family, and I don't just mean with my immediate family. Family includes my new friends, my Quichua children, my job at CEDEI, my customers, my rescued pets, AND my immediate family. My mom, my son, and I have all grown closer and living here has taught me much about myself and about the person that I continue to strive to be.

I understand that you have a microbusiness...can you tell us more about that?

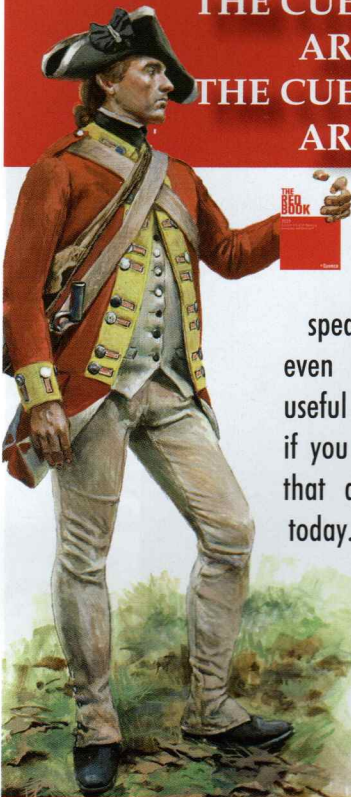
I started a company called Basic Nature. I didn't turn it into

a business until I moved to Ecuador. Where we lived everyone made natural products, so there really wasn't a market for me to sell, so I made products for friends and family. I have much love for the healing power of plants. I use a lot of different local medical herbs in my products. Most of my customers have various allergies or simply want to live an all-natural lifestyle. I understand allergies, because of an illness that I have, and can include or exclude any ingredients to cater to the individual needs of each person.

To try my products, you can find me at CEDEI, Gran Colombia 11-02 y General Torres, every Wednesday morning from 10am to 1pm. I also have a number of products at Mashca Galeria, Luis Cordero 5-48 Honorato Vasquez y Juan Jaramillo, and I'm also part of the Cuenca Holistic Health Network. You can also e-mail me at: www.bascinatureproducts@gmail.com.



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Hailing from Calgary, Canada Neil Mailer is a young entrepreneur living in Cuenca Ecuador trying to carve out a piece of the action and take his passion for travel and adventure across the country. A Good Samaritan, sports enthusiast, washed-up athlete, card player and jack of all trades. Neil is a self-made thousandaire looking to make a life with his girlfriend and his French bulldog Sophie south of the Equator.

WHERE WAS THE LAST PLACE YOU LIVED BEFORE MOVING TO CUENCA?

Before coming to Cuenca I lived in Calgary Alberta. Spent nearly all of my 30 years there before I got on a plane to South America

WHY CUENCA?

The short answer, I fell in love. I had always wanted to see what life was like in other countries around the world. Cuenca was never on the map really. I was dating a girl back in Calgary who was planning on moving here and the opportunity presented itself. I jumped in head first. I've been here now for just shy of 2 years.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT CUENCA?

Cuenca is changing every day. There has been so much progress even in the 2 years I have been here. We all get to watch the city grow up into the world. I really enjoy the combination of the new and old meeting to create this unique cultural fusion that we all get to be a part of.

WHAT WAS YOUR PROFESSION BEFORE YOU RETIRED?

Well, seeing as I am only 32, retirement is way off into the future. I have done a little bit of everything over my lifetime. Everything ranging from a mechanic, car salesman, framer, cabinet designer, drafter, custom home superintendent and lastly, before coming to Cuenca I was a Project Manager for a multi-family home developer. I am currently working in the vibrant online marketing world. This has given me the opportunity to travel and see so much of this incredible country. With so much left to discover, something tells me that the fun is only just beginning.

IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME, WOULD YOU DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT, AND IF SO, WHAT?

I really wouldn't change a thing. Sure I've made some bad decisions but I've made some pretty great ones too. All of those experiences have made me who I am today. I guess if I had to pick something I would go back in time and invest in Google.

DO YOU MAKE FRIENDS EASILY?

Sometimes yes, sometimes no. I am definitely a talkative person so that works for and against me sometimes.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE PIG OUT FOOD?

Sushi, no question! There hasn't been a city I have visited with my girlfriend that didn't involve copious amounts of sushi. Noe definitely raised the bar for us.

IF YOU COULD GET RID OF ONE STATE IN THE US WHICH WOULD IT BE AND WHY?

Alaska could be Canada and no one would know the difference. Outside of Russia being right next door and a couple military bases that they would have put there anyway, I don't see how much of an impact Alaska makes for the US anymore. They would have had a few less natural disasters. Plus how many Americans actually go to Alaska? I think they could do without it.

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A Cuenca Christmas and New Year

By Samy Proaño Arce

Photos by Dan Austin (danoinec.blogspot.com)

As we approach the upcoming holiday season it is interesting how differently they are celebrated in Ecuador versus other countries. While you can find commercialization in the big cities here, in the smaller communities you can escape the hype and shopping completely.

Christmas is an important religious festival in this predominantly Catholic country. In Cuenca, celebrations begin early in December with Novenas, masses and events recalling the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. The highpoint is the festival of the traveling Infant Child, the Pase del Niño Viajero, on December 24th.

It's an all day affair, with a parade that

illustrates the journey. Starting at the Barrio del Corazón de Jesús, it is led by the guiding star, and accompanied by angels, the Three Kings, officials, shepherds and huge numbers of costumed children. After ending at Parque Calderón the Niño is taken to the Catedral de la Inmaculada for religious services honoring the birth of Christ.

There are floats illustrating religious themes as well as the principal float carrying the Niño Viajero, borne by clerics. Along with the religious nature of the procession, there is also the native influence. Horses and llamas carrying local produce, cooked cuy (guinea pig), chickens, and sweets march together with musicians, creating a rich, colorful, and musical display.

The Pase del Niño Viajero is the second in a series of Cuencan Pasadas celebrating the Infant Jesus. The first takes place on the first Sunday of Advent. The third is the Pase del Niño on the first of January, and the last is the Pase del Niño Rey, on the fifth of January on the day before the Día de los Reyes Magos, Epiphany, when children receive presents from the Magi.

Other Christmas traditions include eating Christmas dinner at midnight on Christmas Eve, with the result that much of Christmas Day is spent... recovering from eating dinner at midnight on Christmas Eve.

Sweets and biscuits are given in huge quantities at this time of year. Although Christmas gifts are exchanged, they are usually token gifts rather than



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Whereas in many places resolutions are made for the next year, New Year in Ecuador is as much about the Old Year as the new. Effigies are made of old clothes stuffed with newspaper and adorned with a mask. These are known as the "Año Viejo" or Old Year, and are burnt at midnight on New Year's Eve. The idea is to leave any problems or negativity behind in the old year and start afresh. A list of problems and worries may be written and put inside the effigy to be burnt. Those who want to travel in the year to come might jump over the burning old year carrying a suitcase.

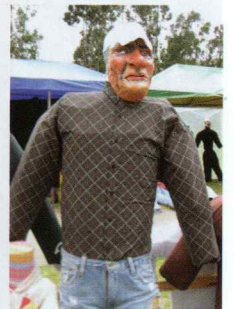
The number 12, representing the 12 months of the year, is also significant. Celebrants often jump over the burning effigy 12 times for good luck, and eat 12 grapes, which represent a wish for every month in the New Year.

Even the color of underwear is important in bringing in the New Year. Women wear red if they hope to find love, and yellow if it's abundance they want to attract in the coming year.

At midnight the fireworks begin, and the sky lights up with public and private displays.

New Year celebrations are often private family affairs, but look out for "Crazy Widows" on the streets who cry and demand money. The widows are men (and sometimes children) who block off streets and won't let you pass until some change is given. All is in good fun, and the money collected is supposed to be for fireworks or expenses the men had in the Old Year.

Despite any differences in how they may celebrate, most residents in all countries around the world hope for peace and prosperity in the year ahead.



Our guest contributor, Samy Proaño Arce, was born in Cuenca and is a graduate of the University of Azuay with a major in social communications.

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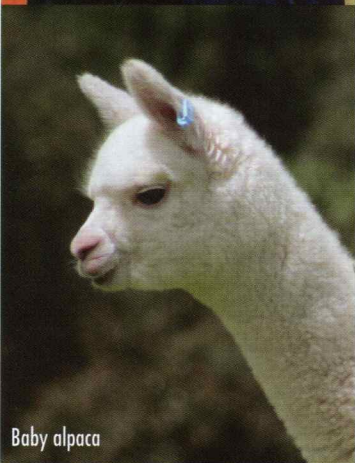
By Staff Writer



The alpaca herd



Patricia & Stuart



Baby alpaca



Adult alpaca



More alpacas

Alpacas produce a luxurious fiber esteemed by textile connoisseurs throughout the world. The history of this domestic species extends back five thousand years. By the time the Spanish arrived 500 years ago, alpacas were being raised everywhere in the central Andes, and the conquerors would certainly have found these “sheep of the Andes” grazing the hillsides and grassland páramos within what we know today as Ecuador. But alpacas became extinct in this country during the late 1800s, after centuries of decline due to disease, displacement by introduced European livestock, and a progressive decay of indigenous culture, including the husbandry know-how of indigenous herders.

Stuart White moved to Ecuador in 1982 from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and has been raising alpacas in Cañar province since 1984 in an effort to return this species to the country’s livestock lineup. After three decades of caretaking and selective breeding, his alpaca herd is widely considered to be the best in the country.

The story might end here were it not for Patricia Espadero, a veterinarian and Cuenca who married Stuart in 1999. Patricia shared Stuart’s passion for alpacas, and while they began to build their family, the alpaca herd also grew. Now they have three children and graze 520 alpacas on pastures of their Mazar Wildlife Reserve. It is called a wildlife reserve because the alpacas occupy only 3.5% of the property, while the rest of the land remains as undisturbed native habitat. Here a complete wild fauna can be found, including the Andean

bear, mountain lion, spotted cats, brocket deer, Andean fox and mountain tapir. 160 species of birds have been inventoried, and 10 species of frogs, four new to science. Patricia and Stuart’s property, like that of their closest neighbors, is so rich and intact that they were included in an expansion of Sangay National Park decreed in 1992.

As a national park in-holding, their property represents a special responsibility—one that dovetails with Patricia and Stuart’s life-long commitment to biodiversity and watershed conservation. With the defense of wild habitats as a fundamental goal, Patricia developed a business plan, and set it in motion: Alpacas raised on pastures of the Mazar Wildlife Reserve produce the quality fiber and quality textiles that fund the conservation of the surrounding montane forests and grassland páramos. A store in Cuenca was needed to showcase the products, and be the point-of-sale for a wide variety of alpaca products, most from the alpacas grazing pastures of the Mazar Wildlife Reserve.

Thus All Things Alpaca Ecuador was born. The store found its home at Honorato Vazquez 6-28, in a historic building, and is now open for business. It represents the culmination of Patricia’s dream, and no doubt the start of another. Products include yarn of a variety of natural and dyed colors and presentations; hand knitted high-quality sweaters designed by Patricia and her collaborators; scarves, hats; blankets; pelts; and rugs knotted by hand. Alpaca tack includes wooly chaps and horse blankets woven on the Andean back strap loom. Patricia also sells organic alpaca manure


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in 10 lb. bags—an odorless, balanced fertilizer for gardens and potted houseplants. In addition, she anticipates offering products from alpaca herds kept by indigenous communities located in buffer zones and conservation areas of southern Ecuador (including Sangay, Cajas and Chimborazo national parks), as a commercial outlet for these communities and an incentive for their efforts at sustainable production and wild habitat protection.

Social responsibility is crucial for Patricia. Reflecting this ethic, she has found local artisans and women's knitting cooperatives to make the products she offers in her store. Clients are guaranteed that the alpaca clothing and home goods offered by All Things Alpaca Ecuador are sumptuous, stylish, and supportive of biodiversity and water resource conservation, while crafted in Ecuador from the finest alpaca fiber.

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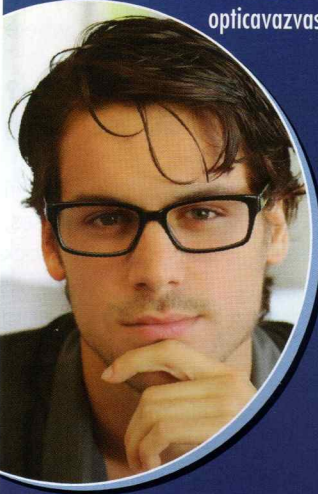





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Jim and Kara Shea Davis

By Susan Herron

I understand you have known each other for a long time. When did you meet?

Kara Shea: Well, I was 2 weeks old and Jim was 1 year old.
 Jim: We were living in Dorena, MO and our parents were best friends. Our grandparents knew each other as well.

Kara Shea: I was about 5 years old when we moved to Jackson, MS. I moved back to East Prairie, MO, near Dorena, when I was in the 10th grade.

With this long friendship, when did you know you wanted to marry?

Kara Shea: We were friends in high school but never dated then.

Jim: It wasn't until my junior year at Annapolis in 1974 that we started dating. We had our first date when I was home on Christmas leave.

Kara Shea: I moved to Maryland during Jim's senior year and attended the University of Maryland.

Jim: I asked Kara Shea to marry me December 1975 and we married June 19, 1976.

When you graduated from Annapolis, where were you stationed?

Jim: I had wanted to be in the Navy with submarines but discovered I was color blind, so that ruled that out. I joined the Marines.

Kara Shea: We were stationed at Quantico, VA;

Camp Lajeune, NC; Buford, SC; and Okinawa. Our eldest child, Alia, was born in Okinawa in 1980.

Jim: After my 5 years active duty we moved to Montgomery, AL.

Kara Shea: Our other children, Joli, Adam, and Sage, were born there.

What did you do once you got out of the service?

Jim: We went to work for a manufacturing company making wiring harnesses.

Kara Shea: That lasted 8 years, and then we started our own manufacturing business. We manufactured wiring harnesses, cable assemblies, printed circuit card assemblies, and black box assemblies.

Jim: We sold our business in 2008 and retired. We wanted to just enjoy life and do some gardening.

Kara Shea: In 2010 Jim decided he needed a hobby and started raising organic bees. It didn't take long before I hardly saw him as his "hobby" started consuming his time.

When did you start thinking of the possibility of living overseas?

Jim: I started doing research about 10 years ago as the idea really appealed to me.

Kara Shea: I wasn't ready to leave our kids and our home at that time.

Jim: In 2010 we came for our first trip and spent a month visiting several cities.

Kara Shea: I still wasn't ready to make the move, we had just built a house and our kids still needed us.

So, when did you decide to make the move to Cuenca?

Kara Shea: In June of this year we came down for a month.
 Jim: Kara Shea said if we could find a 3-bedroom/2-bath apartment with a terrace, on the river, that would take two dogs, she would make the move.

Kara Shea: It had to be large enough to accommodate us plus my dad. I am an only child and he would be living with us. He has dementia, so finding the right house was very important.
 Jim: We found the house Kara Shea was looking for on the very last day we were here and rented it then.

When did you make the big move?

Jim: We moved down on September 2, 2015 and started our visa process.

Kara Shea: We wanted to have both of us established and find someone who could care for my dad during the day before we brought him down.

Jim: I made arrangements to go back November 1st and pick up my father-in-law.

Kara Shea: It was a nail biting few days, as we didn't get our visa and cédula until the very last minute.

Now that you are down here and semi-established, what do your Date Nights look like?

Jim: It's nothing fancy. I am sure, like so many other new expats, we love to explore the city.

Kara Shea: We love going to Joe's Secret Garden, love the Greek nights. They also make great vegetarian dishes.

Jim: And there are always the ball games on TV.

Kara Shea: Not really a Date Night, but going to the Amazon and Galapagos is on our bucket list.



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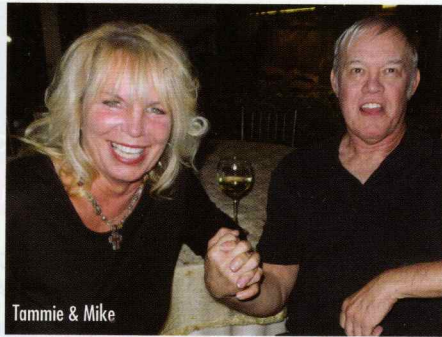
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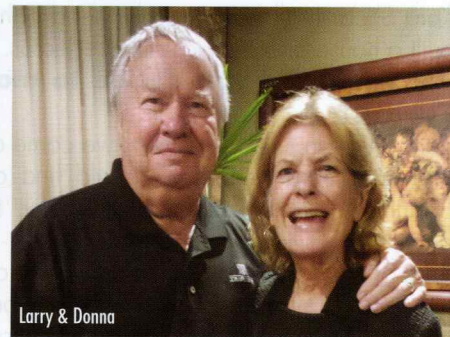
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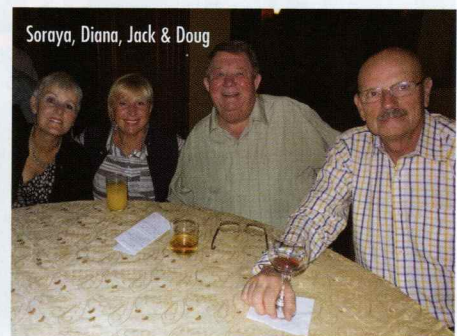
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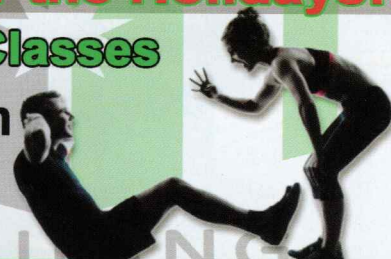
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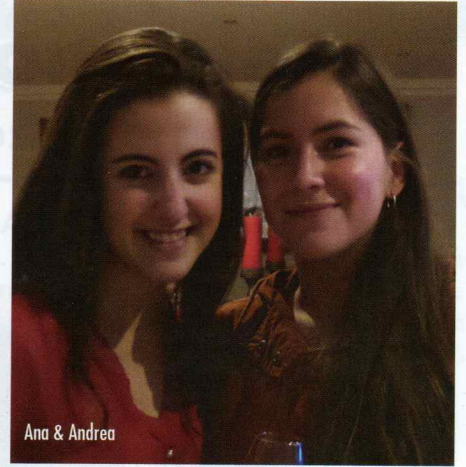




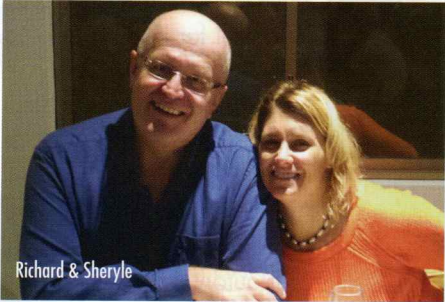
Alba & Juan



Lea and Hunter



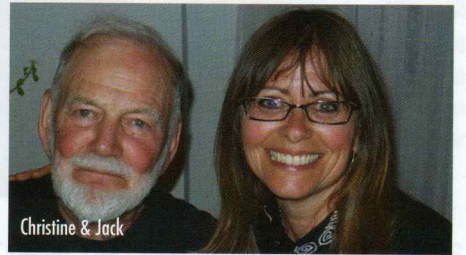
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Reflections on Thanksgiving

By Ed Lindquist

All of us learned the Thanksgiving story in our elementary school days. Remember dressing up as either a Pilgrim or an Indian? The teacher told the story of how a group from England, desiring spiritual freedom, sailed from Europe on a small ship called the Mayflower, and landed on the northeast coast of modern day New England. How the group faced extreme hardship and lost to sickness half their number the first year. Then with the help of the indigenous people, the new settlers learned to live off the land and survive. After their first successful harvest, the settlers called for a three day feast, invited their Indian neighbors, and celebrated together what history records as the first Thanksgiving.

I had the privilege of hosting a Thanksgiving dinner last month. What was amazing to me (other than we found space for a sit down dinner for 51 in the apartment), we were reenacting a version of the same Thanksgiving story. As I looked across the tables, about half were



English-speaking expats, one from as far away as Finland. The other half were Ecuadorians, many themselves having been Spanish-speaking expats in North America. All sharing a meal together. All thankful for our many blessings.

Like our Pilgrim forefathers, many of us have come to Cuenca for spiritual or economic reasons. Others for adventure or to escape a changing North American culture. While we, as modern day Pilgrims, have none of the hardships encountered by our ancestors nearly 400 years ago, we have faced our own challenges learning to live in a new land. And we have all been helped, time after time, by friendly Cuencanos who have

welcomed us to their city.

We have much to be thankful for in our adopted city. Friendly people, affordable living, perfect weather, a diversity of cultural activities, beautiful colonial architecture, and a growing international restaurant scene, to name but a few. One of the most important benefits is the welcoming attitude of its

political leadership. We recently had the opportunity of meeting with Cuenca Mayor, Marcelo Cabrera Palacios. He made it clear a number of times during the conversation that he was mayor of all Cuencanos—native born and expat. Another example of this welcoming attitude is the city's new program called "Cuencanizate." Its purpose is to offer an opportunity for expats to integrate more fully into the daily life and culture of the city.

The original Pilgrims were able to build a successful and prosperous life in their new adopted county. That's my wish for all of us here.

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