

4-15-2015

Person to Person in Ecuador

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Recommended Citation

King, Arianne, "Person to Person in Ecuador" (2015). *2014-15 Field Notes*. Essay. Submission 10.
https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/intl_fieldnotes_1415/10

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NAME Arianne King COUNTRY Ecuador Date 4-15-15

Mid-semester Assessment

Although I'm about 4 months into this adventure, I can still vividly remember the customs of Ecuador that surprised me the most upon arrival. The very first time I saw my host mother, she met me in a loving embrace and kiss on the side of the cheek. Likewise, I met the other host parents in that same moment, greeting each and every woman with a hug and kiss on the cheek and the men with a kiss next to the cheek. The reality of this did not become habit until about a month in when I saw it rampantly at USFQ. It did not matter what time of day it was, or how you were feeling; the expectation was that you greet family members and friends with a kiss next to the cheek.

Another aspect of Ecuador that has stuck out to me tremendously is how the culture has incorporated different gender roles into their everyday lives. It could vary from household to household, but my mother has shown me the epitome of how a mother takes on responsibility in everyday life. She is a stay at home mother, which was not an aspect in my childhood. Even though she stays at home most days, she is working; cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, fixing the house, mending clothes, shopping, and preparing food for her kids. It amazes me that I've hardly ever seen her off her feet in the house. When I first arrived, I assumed I would have to take some responsibility in keeping up the house, whether that included doing dishes, doing my own laundry, cleaning, etc. However, the first few times I tried, not seconds would pass when my host mom would rush to my side, shooing me away or simply taking over the task. This was hard to get used to at first, especially, since I've been living on my own the past few years. My host mother is widowed, so the only man in my house is my older brother. More so, it is very common that children will live with their parents until they are 30 years old, or until they are married. My brother works all day and is tended to by my host mom when he gets home.

Another habit of the household that I hadn't been accustomed to in sometime was the eating schedules. Every morning I eat breakfast at the same time; scrambled eggs, bread, instant coffee, freshly made juice, and a cup of chia water. I go to school and for lunch, depending on if I eat at the school or go home, the typical meal includes; first, a bowl of freshly made soup and then, second, a big plate of rice, meat, and a type of salad. Without a doubt, the abundance and diversity of fruit in Ecuador has been a highlight of this trip. I've never had better freshly made juices in my life! Lunch is the biggest meal of the day, and when what I would think of dinnertime comes around, my host mother calls me for some "cafecito", where we drink a cup of coffee with some bread. I've actually really enjoyed the eating schedule because it is so consistent. When I'm at school, it's not rare when I actually forget to eat, because I haven't been on the meal plan this past year.

Furthermore, whenever family members are at home, it is expected and normal that everybody eats together. With some borchata, merengue, or reggaeton in the background, we converse, gossip, and catch up with each other's days. There is an immense value placed on a united family in Ecuador.

The last aspect of the cultural transition was the role of machisimo. Although, women, in general, tend to draw more attention to themselves than men, the attention drawn here is ridiculously obvious. Anytime a girl is on the sidewalks, bus, waiting outside a building; as an observer or the target, one will hear constant kissy sounds being made, honks by passing cars, and

covert whispers of men passing by saying, "princesa, mi amor, linda, bonita". At first, I was super aware of this aspect of Ecuador, and it really bothered me. My host mother told me to ignore them, and I did everything I could to do that, fighting off the urge to shoot them a dirty look. I still notice it, but it has become so expected and normal, I am now basically immune to the cat calls.

These are just a few of the most noted cultural differences I've encountered in Ecuador. It's amazing how much more aware I've become of my own culture, based on what I've noticed living in another. Four months in and I am still learning new things every day! I really enjoy the environment here because it shows me that there are other parts of the world that I believe hold some great values that other parts of the world can learn from.

Yolanda Leon, host mother, 4/08/15