

MindStormPhoto Ecuador 2014 pt 2



Burt and Evelyn Johnson

Ecuador 2014 pt 2

Table Of Contents

Vilcabamba	2
Volcano Erupts	11
Antenna Farm and FotoClub #2	13
Plein Air in Déleg	19
Opening Bank Account	22
Free Music Everywhere	24
Love and Passion	26
FotoClub Cuenca Night Photo Walk	29
Berkeley Home For Sale	33
30 Days of Madness	37
I Could Feel The Soap Melting...	44
Honey, I Shrunk The Condo	53
SOLD	56
Day In The Country	57
Applesauce	61
Cajas – Lake Zorrocucho	65
High End Apartment Rental	68
Foundation Day	71
Palm Sunday and Cajas Art	76
Semana Santa	81
Viernes Santo	83
Futbol Pandemonium	87

Vilcabamba

Vilcabamba



Vilcabamba

We took the bus to Loja, and then a taxi to Vilcabamba for a few days this past week. We have heard quite a lot about the area and decided we wanted to check it out. As is common on inter-city busses in Ecuador, the driver put a DVD on for entertainment. Usually it is a movie with the audio either off or too low to hear (and in Spanish). This time we saw something entirely different though. We got an [hour of bull trimming](#) -- a variant on bull fighting, which has the audience in the ring. The DVD mostly centered on the disasters where the bull won the exchange. It was like watching a car wreck -- disturbing, but you can't seem to turn away...



Vilcabamba

We went on the trip with Ann and William, a couple we met a year ago on our first extended stay in Cuenca. They still live back in the States and love to wander (hence the [name of their blog](#)). They liked Cuenca enough to come back for another month. You can kinda get a feel for their personalities by seeing them above, walking behind Evelyn.



We hired a René as a driver and guide to take us around the area for one day.

Vilcabamba



First stop was a small boutique coffee producer.

Vilcabamba



Of course everyone had to buy some freshly ground coffee for home.



As we walked in the fields, we found these oxen, which Evelyn had to photograph. Reminded me of the time she spooked some yaks in Tibet...

Vilcabamba



René wanted to show us a waterfall... with a drop of about 2 feet...?

Vilcabamba



Orchards of coffee, limes, and bananas abounded. The power lines had strange furry plants growing on them too?

Vilcabamba



Next stop was a small sugar cane processing business.

Vilcabamba



The kids loved to eat the sugar straight from the vats, and of course they all loved to play with Evelyn.

, February 1, 2014

Volcano Erupts

Volcano Erupts



Volcano erupts (image courtesy El Mercurio newspaper)



Truck in our parking lot with fine layer of volcanic ash

Volcano Erupts

We lived in Beaverton, Oregon in 1980 when Mt St. Helens erupted. We could see the eruption from our house, and ash covered the town several times over the following weeks. Today we had a small visitation that brought back those memories. A volcano erupted about 210 km North of us. We only got a very slight dusting, and it was easy to not even notice what was going on, other than an odd murkiness in the air and slippery sidewalks that left a slight trail when walked on.

This morning we read what had really happened. Following is a snippet from Gringo Tree, a local English language email newsletter oriented towards expats here in Cuenca:

Cuenca Gets Volcanic Ashfall

For only the second time in memory, Cuenca has been dusted with volcanic ash. It came early Sunday morning from the eruption of the Tungurahua volcano, 210 kilometers to the north. The previous ashfall came during an eruption of the Sangay volcano almost 60 years ago. According to meteorologists, the ash from Tungurahua reached Cuenca due to a variation in the normal pattern of high-altitude winds.

The overnight ashfall was enough to force temporary closure of the Cuenca airport and bring out battalions of city street sweepers; the city opted for brooms, concerned that washing away the ash with water could clog city sewers. Cuenca got off easy: In towns and cities near the volcano, such as Ambato and Baños, ash deposits were up to four inches deep.

Saturday's explosions at Tungurahua sent an ash plume almost six miles into the atmosphere and aviation authorities said the cloud could shut down air travel for the entire country if it persists, and if winds shift to the west.

Although health officials said the Cuenca ashfall did not pose serious health threats, they advised people with respiratory problems to remain indoors and wear masks when they go outside.

Antenna Farm and FotoClub #2

Antenna Farm and FotoClub #2

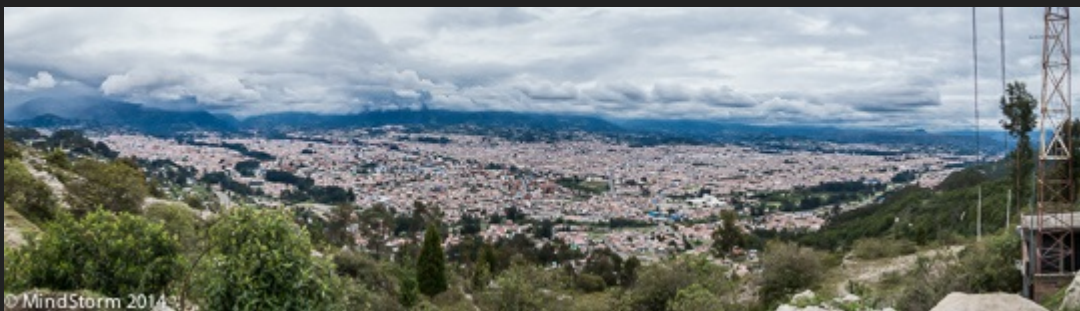
We went out to check the progress of a carpenter making my new desk today, in Chilcapamba. After we had approved the preliminary construction of the desk units, the driver asked if we wanted to see the antennae farm, where there was a panoramic view of the city. We agreed, and started up a road that I would have sworn could only be traversed by a 4-wheel drive. After nearly half an hour of inching up an almost-road with a sheer drop-off cliff the entire way, we finally stopped for a view. There were at least 50 massive antenna mounted on top of this mountain, which must have included every company in town that has an interest in sending signals.



Evelyn and Lorell look out over the view, while an antenna farm looms behind

Antenna Farm and FotoClub #2

This photo of antennae is only a small segment of the hilltop. I have a dozen such images, covering different sets of them, but this pretty much tells the story. Note the houses nestled among the antenna. I presume these homeowners receive a rent for their property, and with that many antenaes, I expect they are able to live off that rental income. Of course, that is an assumption based on North American property laws though, and I do not really know the situation of these people. Someday I would like to learn Spanish well enough to talk to these people and learn their stories...



Panorama of Cuenca from antenna farm area

The taxi driver was right about the panoramic view of Cuenca. The view was a spectacular view of the city.

Tonight was the second meeting of the Cuenca FotoClub that I attended, and the first time I submitted images for discussion. I still have to get used to the Ecuadorian way of keeping time... The meeting was scheduled to begin at 7:30 at La Riera, a restaurant about 3 blocks from our condo. I was tempted to arrive early, but held off and arrived at 7:28 -- only to find I was the first one there. A couple minutes later (right smack at 7:30), the president and vice-president arrived, and I gave them my photos from my USB stick, ordered a snack, then sat down.

Antenna Farm and FotoClub #2

People dribbled in over the next half hour, with 21 members there by 8:00, which is when the meeting was actually started. That number continued to grow, and was up to 33 attendees by 8:30, well after the meeting started. I am still on "California Time", where all but one or two people arrived before the stated starting time of the photo club meeting in Berkeley. I still have to ease up a bit before I can set my watch by "Ecuadorian Time"...

The FotoClub meeting is entirely in rapid-fire Spanish, so I end up catching key words here and there and try to figure out context. The meeting opened with the introduction of a professional photographer. I had seen a reference to Photoshop and Lightroom training coming up in the club FaceBook page, and thought this was the person giving those classes. At the end of the introduction, I *thought* the president was asking how many people were interested in taking the class. I was intrigued to see almost every hand went up. I did not put up my hand, because (1) I could probably teach those classes (albeit in English) and (2) I don't understand Spanish well enough to benefit from them.

Antenna Farm and FotoClub #2



fotografia científica

Gustavo Morejón

Antenna Farm and FotoClub #2

It turned out that Gustavo Morejón was prepared to make a presentation on his scientific photography. He proceeded with an interesting talk. He was clearly a good speaker, though I wish I understood more of what he was saying. At one point, he was talking about the difficulty of identifying critters he had photographed, and I understood an almost universal phrase -- "Thank God for Google!" Yep, I guess that feeling is as true in Ecuador as it is in California.



Gustav's presentation was informative and entertaining at the same time

After Gustav's presentation, the meeting returned to the standard commenting on photographs submitted by members. Unfortunately, I was having mental fatigue part way through this section. It was the end of a long day, and I had been concentrating for well over an hour trying to understand rapid-fire Spanish, and I was understanding less and less of what was said. Several photographs elicited laughter, but I was unable to tell what the source of the mirth was, since the photographs themselves were not obviously funny in any way I could see.

Antenna Farm and FotoClub #2

By the time my images were presented, I was sufficiently fatigued that I did not really understand what was being said. I did hear a couple of gasps, and a couple of "wow!" comments, which sounded encouraging, but in the end neither of my photos was even chosen for the initial round of voting, let alone selected as winners.

After the meeting, I went up to the president (one of three members that speaks fluent English), and admitted that I did not really understand the discussion on my images. I had noted that there was almost no Photoshop used on any of the other photos I had seen in two photo club meetings. He said that the club had decided a couple years ago that Photoshop was to be minimal and never obvious. However, he then said that the club changed its mind last November and had a 'challenge' where Photoshop had to be a major contributor to the image. The club is not really accustomed to the heavy use of Photoshop, and tends not to respond that well to it at this point.

He then stated that he had only submitted one image tonight (he did not win, so I am not sure which was his), and that my images convinced him to start submitting at least one 'controversial' image each session in the future. It will be interesting to see what he shows in future weeks...

One interesting side note. When I approached him, I did not say which photos were mine, but he immediately identified them. As I rather expected, my style is sufficiently different from the rest of the club that it stands out pretty quickly.

Plein Air in Déleg

Plein Air in Déleg



Two paintings completed by Evelyn on this trip

(post by Evelyn)

It has been 10 years since I painted with acrylic paint in plein air, and my experience with the paint was so frustrating that I switched to oil. This time the experience was different... I painted in the shade and used larger puddles of paint. Plus, Gary Myers, formerly an art teacher from Santa Fe, New Mexico, has such a calming effect and is able to bring out the creative side of everyone in the workshop.

Plein Air in Déleg - MindStormPhoto Blog and Gallery

The Déleg work shop is definitely worthwhile. Gary discussed adding a sketching outing, where the van would move the students around to different areas over the course of a day. His current plan is to rotate between Thursdays and Saturdays weekly, and his goal is to develop an art community who could paint together.

I was able to complete one painting before lunch and one after lunch, both shown above. Arie provided a delicious barbecue chicken for lunch, and was always attentive with paint, water, and drinks. Overall, it was a great workshop.

Plein Air in Déleg - MindStormPhoto Blog and Gallery



, February 9, 2014

Art, Education, Evelyn

Opening Bank Account

Opening Bank Account



We now have an Ecuadorian saving account, which gives us a Debit Card and online ability to pay Ecuadorian vendors, as well as the ability for free ATM cash access. There are a few bloggers that have detailed how to go about this in the past, so we had a pretty good idea of what to expect. The best of these was on [Gringos Abroad](#), which gives a detailed list of information needed. Read his post to see what documents to bring.

Turns out the process was a bit easier than we expected, based on others telling us their stories, and reading other blogs.

Opening Bank Account

We went back to the initial lobby desk and said again that we wanted to open an account. The agent said (in Spanish) that we needed to go upstairs...? I said "No, Omar dijo primo piso" (Omar told us first floor). She looked at me oddly and said "Si, esta es planta baja. Piso primo esta arriba" (yes, this is the the ground floor. First floor is above). Wow! I was in the wrong place, but i could actually understand her directions! That is success in my book!

The rest is rather boring. We found an agent that would take our papers, He typed a whole lot of forms, printed out a large stack of papers, and told us to come back the following Monday to get our cards (the whole transaction being in Spanish). The following week (today), we picked up the debit card and e-key card for online access. We are now officially bank customers.

, February 11, 2014

Ecuador

Free Music Everywhere

Free Music Everywhere



Free jazz concert in the plaza behind Iglesia Todos Santos

Free Music Everywhere

We continue to be amazed by the amount of free music around Cuenca. A couple nights ago we were walking towards a restaurant and heard a band tuning up. We wandered over a block and found a hard rock band playing on a temporary stage next door to the Coffee Tree. That one was a bit too loud for our tastes, so we left fairly quickly, wishing to keep what hearing we still have...

Tonight we heard about a free jazz concert a couple blocks from our condo, so we went over to listen to it after dinner. This was a local jazz group playing in the courtyard of Todos Santos, one of the beautiful old churches in town.

Tomorrow there will be a free symphony performance, which we will also likely go to.

, February 14, 2014

[Art](#), [Event](#), [Music](#), [Theater](#)

Love and Passion

Love and Passion



Dinner at "That's Amore" had only two choices tonight -- "menu of love" or "menu of passion." We had both!

Love and Passion

Valentine's Day seems a bigger deal here in Cuenca than back in Berkeley. All day long, we saw women walking with single roses, and couples arm-in-arm. Though young couples dominated, there was plenty of grey hair also holding roses and walking arm-in-arm too. Similar to Berkeley, every good restaurant was sold out, though we got reservations at a brand new place called *That's Amore*. There were only two choices for their special dinner, so we each had one and shared the meals. Those are the "Coctel *That's Amore*" drinks with Evelyn above.



The presentation of the dishes was outstanding, and left us wishing we could both keep them and eat them at the same time... The appetizers and desserts were all fabulous. Unfortunately, the main courses looked better than they tasted, but were good enough for us to want to return and try the regular menu.

Love and Passion



After dinner, we returned home for an hour, and then went back out to the symphony. This program was celebrating the 150th anniversary of the *Collegio Benigno Malo*, which is a High School we can see from our condo bedroom window. We didn't recognize any of the pieces played tonight, but enjoyed them all. Other than four instrumentals, the other pieces all featured six vocalists, singly and in groups. Their voices were superb, though we are not able to yet understand very much from the songs.

, February 15, 2014

[Art](#), [Event](#), [Food](#), [Music](#), [Theater](#)

FotoClub Cuenca Night Photo Walk

FotoClub Cuenca Night Photo Walk



FotoClub Cuenca members (plus random birthday group that walked through, sitting down front). I'm in the blue jacket just below standing group on the (photo) right.

I showed up at the [FotoClub Cuenca](#) meeting tonight, expecting to try out a couple of my photographs on the group, only to find most people standing around with cameras in hand, or on tripods. I walked over to Alianza (a club Board member who speaks fluent English) and asked what was going on. It seems there was an email sent out (that I did not get), and it was posted on [Facebook](#) (which I almost never read), that we were going to do a nighttime photo walk this week.

FotoClub Cuenca Night Photo Walk

I have avoided doing any serious night photography so far, both because of my aching ankle (which I broke 4 months ago in 3 places), and concern about hauling around a lot of expensive equipment at night -- in *any* town, not just in Cuenca. Here was a chance to go out with other photographers, giving safety in numbers. I quickly walked back home, gathered up my camera and tripod and returned to the restaurant where the club meets. Fortunately the restaurant is only about four blocks away, and things in Ecuador never start on time...



My first serious test of my new tilt-shift lens on Iglesia Todos Santos

FotoClub Cuenca Night Photo Walk

First stop was at Inglesia Todos Santos, a well lit decorative church half a block from the meeting restaurant. This was an excellent chance to try out my new tilt-shift lens, which I bought just before coming here. As with most buildings in Cuenca, the church is right up against the street. Being a tall building with almost no frontage means that a very wide angle lens is needed to capture it at all. Using a traditional wide angle results in an image where the building will appear to be falling backwards, with strongly slanted vertical lines. A tilt-shift lens helps reduce that problem, but it is a very tricky lens to learn how to use. Tonight gave me my first real street test. I clearly need more practice with this monster, but the initial results were hopeful.



Restaurant Santorino is a new place we liked when we went there last week. Its colorful entryway made it an interesting photo subject.

FotoClub Cuenca Night Photo Walk



Several Middle Eastern food vendors make schwarmi from chicken cooked on sidewalk burners. I tried my first one tonight as a snack -- it was delicious!

, February 20, 2014

Event, Photography

Berkeley Home For Sale

Berkeley Home For Sale



Street View of Our Berkeley Home

Now that we are fully ensconced in Ecuador, it is time to sell our home of 26 years in Berkeley, CA. We had the first broker open house yesterday, with very strong response. The first public open house will be this weekend. [You can get full listing details by clicking here.](#)

Berkeley Home For Sale

The house has been fully staged, so I thought I would show some of the current images. Those who have visited us in the past will see how different the furniture makes it look. Rather classy, though I would have a hard time living in such naked rooms myself...



Upper floor, showing living room (top), dining room (lower left) and kitchen (lower right)

Berkeley Home For Sale



Middle and lower floors, showing office (upper), master bedroom (lower left) and living space of lower floor (lower right)

Berkeley Home For Sale



View from the top deck (upper) and lower deck (below)

, February 21, 2014

30 Days of Madness

30 Days of Madness



The last night of election campaigning included several fireworks displays, including this one shot from our living room window.

Ecuador has an interesting election cycle -- I think the USA could learn something from their process.

Nobody is allowed to campaign until 30 days before the election. All campaigning must stop 48 hours before the election day, as must all sales of alcohol. The sitting president is not allowed to campaign, since that would be diverting his attention from running the country. Thus, the president (Correa currently) resigns from his post 30 days before the election, leaving the Vice President in charge of the country. The day after the election, he is sworn back in.

30 Days of Madness

Campaign posters never show up until 30 days before the election. Those posters must all be removed within a short time after the election (10 days, I believe), or the city will remove them, charging the political parties for such removal. This keeps the city clean and free of political smut except for a 30 day period every two years.

During those 30 days though, the city is a madhouse! Parades almost every day. Music venues set up for political parties (in both senses of the word). We attended both rock and jazz concerts put on as part of the campaign. Sound trucks cruise the roads, blaring their party's theme song interspersed with some campaign talking that we could not understand (poor Spanish skills...). Fireworks several times a week. General pandemonium until the required quiet period starting 48 hours before the polls open.

The political parties in Ecuador are primarily known by their number. 35 is the party of President Correas. 62-82 is a coalition of two parties (62 and 82) that want to change the leadership. The numbers correspond to the number the party has on the ballot. It is required by law that everyone vote, or face a penalty of 10% of the average Ecuadorian monthly income, which comes to about \$30. Though Ecuador has a [literacy rate of almost 92% \(higher than the USA!\)](#), the ballot numbers still helps those who are not literate, or who simply want to vote a party line.

President Correa is in his last allowed term, with 3 years to go as a lame duck. He was in Cuenca this week campaigning hard for his party's candidates.

30 Days of Madness



Correa rides in an open car, shaking hands and kissing babies. His guards are close by, but I'd never get this close to Obama on the street!

30 Days of Madness



Correa's party is '35' with color green. There was no mistaking which party was in any given parade.

Despite the strong support and campaigning of the sitting President, it appears that his party lost the mayor race in all three major cities of Ecuador -- Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca. Results are not all in, but the newspapers are calling the winners. One report says that Correa has already conceded, even though the polls just closed about 2 hours ago and only 40% or so have reported. That part sounds much like in the States...

30 Days of Madness



The "62-82" party won the local mayoral elections. The top image shows Marcelo Cabrera giving a speech. He is the new (and former) mayor of Cuenca.

30 Days of Madness

In local elections, Marcelo Cabrera was the former mayor of Cuenca, who lost to Paul Granda in the last election. He came back this time, as part of the 62-82 coalition, and won with 51% of the vote, compared to Granda's 46%. Thus, the former mayor is again the current mayor-elect. His stated position is that the light rail is a waste of money and not needed, so we will soon see if he reverses the work done there. That development is early enough, with only a few power poles repositioned thus far, so it is possible the project will now be killed.



Indigenous Ecuadorians went to the 62-82 coalition in large numbers, partly due to opposition of Correa's intentions to drill in the Amazon.

30 Days of Madness



Both sides had active supporters and parades, and in Ecuador you always seem to find clowns as part of any public event.

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...



I could feel the soap melting in my ears, after the vicious attack of el diablillos (aka "the little devils") as we wandered into an unexpected battle zone. Carnaval had begun!

Evelyn had seen some barricades going up earlier today on Parque Calderon. After dinner at [Cesar's](#) (a friend's restaurant around the corner that is closing after tonight while he finds a new location), we decided to head over to the park to see what was going on. We had thought that Carnaval would start Sunday, but found ourselves in Ground Zero of a war zone, designated as the start of Carnaval 2014! (Technically Carnaval is this coming Sunday through Tuesday, but you wouldn't know it from the roving squirt guns already on the streets!)

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...

According to el Mercurio (the local Cuencano newspaper) this was “ 'Jueves de Compadre' (Godfather Thursday) This celebration is part of a plan to rescue the traditions of Carnaval and strengthen tourism. One of the big things will be the sale of cans of spray foam."



Vendors were prowling the park selling variants of "Silly String" that were used by young and old alike to attack anyone within range, inundating them with Carnaval Madness.

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...



Kids were forgiven bedtimes to stay up and attack all comers with all brands of Carnaval Silliness soapy spray.

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...



Various groups presented cultural origins of the holiday, while rock groups played in front of soap-sprayed crowds

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...



Groups of friends enjoyed the party, attacking and then posing for any nearby camera

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...



"Castles" were loaded with fireworks, and young friends would then pose within a few yards of the burning fireworks

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...



Some of the Castle fireworks were then shot overhead, where they rained down on the crowds (I have several nasty burns in my jacket as proof...)

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...



I Could Feel The Soap Melting...

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...



The "Victims" of the attacks seemed to be having as much fun as the attackers... and they were often the same people...

I Could Feel The Soap Melting...

Honey, I Shrunk The Condo

Honey, I Shrunk The Condo



More than a year after we started packing to move to Ecuador, and four months after arriving in Ecuador, our container with all our worldly possessions was delivered today! And somehow, the condo suddenly looks a lot smaller than it did this morning, now that it is buried deep in boxes...

Honey, I Shrunk The Condo

Honey, I Shrunk The Condo

Our container actually arrived at the port in Guayaquil last week, and was inspected by Customs Tuesday of this week. The Customs inspector removed every item from the 20' container we had used, and opened the majority of our boxes, resealing them with Aduana tape. Fortunately though, they did not question anything and it went through cleanly.



The truck carrying our container came in a convoy of similar trucks late last night. It was then parked on a remote wide street, where our contents were transferred to a smaller truck that would be allowed in El Centro, where we live.

Honey, I Shrunk The Condo



That truck was then driven to our building, where a team of five movers brought it all up to our condo.

Now the fun begins, as we spend the next month unpacking everything and getting control of our condo again...

SOLD

SOLD



We decided to sell our California house in January 2013, and finally got it on the market in June 2013 (it took longer to pack & give away a lifetime of stuff, plus prep the house than I had expected). After five months of no offers, we took it off the market in November.

Last month, in February 2014, we put it back on the market again. This time we used a different broker, from Pacific Union, the results were instantaneous. We received an acceptable offer on the first day it was back on the market. The buyers even wanted a 7 day close, but were willing to wait 14 days to give us time to fly to Florida to sign all the legal papers.

So yes, it can now be told -- we spent the past week having a mini-vacation in Florida to sign the closing documents, and then wait around to be sure no hiccups occurred. The house has now closed, the new owners are probably moving in, and we are returning to Ecuador in the morning.

Hurray!

Day In The Country

Day In The Country



Day In The Country

We were invited to a day in the country by a Peruvian family now living in Cuenca. Alberto Soriano is a well known Peruvian artist that Evelyn took painting classes from on our first trip here in 2012. He speaks almost no English, which means we get to practice our Spanish when talking to him. Maite, his wife, is also an excellent artist and speaks English well, so she often steps in as an interpreter when we (frequently) get stuck.



While they were painting, a group of four children gathered around. Evelyn often has young kids gravitate to her, but today Maite became the center of their attention -- likely because of her ability to speak to them in Spanish. The oldest girl also liked to draw, and very studiously drew her youngest sister's face. She then told Maite, "we have decided that I will be Evelyn and my [next oldest] sister will be Maite" -- adoption was now complete!

Day In The Country



While the three of them were painting, I went off to experiment with some photo techniques. I started with seeing how well my ring flash would work on field macro shots, and went in search of insects. I was surprised to see many flies apparently pollinating the plants. In fact, I only saw two bees and at least 100 flies. When I returned home, I used Google (a favorite friend of mine recently!) and discovered that [flies are common pollinators at higher altitudes](#). Since we were at 8400 feet, it appears to be normal here.

I also attempted a new technique I had read about recently -- daytime [stacking of photos for a dramatic image](#). Unfortunately, this works best with a colorful sky and a few fast moving clouds. Today was completely overcast and uniformly grey. As a result, I was able to test the technique, but none of the resulting images were worth keeping.

Day In The Country

After a few hours of painting and photographing, Alberto and Maite invited us to their home for lunch. They put my best kitchen efforts to shame with freshly made ceviche, spinach soup (unusual and delicious!), and spaghetti with shrimp sauce. I picked up a few tricks just watching them cook, and the meal was better than almost any restaurant could have presented.

Three other friends of theirs joined us, along with their two children, and the table was flowing with fast Spanish for the next several hours. I was able to keep up when they spoke slowly and one at a time, but when the conversation ran faster with multiple people speaking, I became completely lost. At that point, Maite probably saw the glaze over my eyes and jumped in to translate just enough phrases to keep me almost in the loop...

All in all, a very pleasant way to spend a Sunday. We have now been invited to spend a few days with them in Peru at some time in the future too, so the adventure continues!

, March 24, 2014

[Education](#), [Evelyn](#), [Family](#), [Food](#), [Spanish](#)

Applesauce

Applesauce



Gloria Uyaguari, Evelyn's favorite Spanish teacher, requires her students to write a diary in Spanish. Evelyn takes private Spanish lessons twice a week at Gloria's home.

Here's a recent page from Evelyn's Spanish diary:

29 de Marzo, el sábado

Gloria y Adrian nos invitaron a su casa de campo cerca de San Bartolomé a recoger manzanas. Adrian era un muy buen conductor y maniobró alrededor de todos los baches en el camino. El campo era muy hermoso.

Estaba feliz de conocer a Julia, que era la major amiga de Gloria y su familia. Julia era muy terrenal y tiene una personalidad agradable.

Applesauce

Primero visitamos la casa del hermano de Gloria, que es un medico que vive en España. La cabaña era muy rústica y tenía aire acondicionado natural.

Entonces, caminamos a través del campo de maíz a la casa de Nancy, que era la Hermana de Gloria.

Su casa también era muy rústica, con paredes de adobe y piso de tierra. Me sorprendió que el baño era modern y un gran contraste con la casa.

Yo estuve feliz de conocer a la familia de Gloria, porque dan la bienvenida a extraños.

Las mujeres cocinaron mientras los hombres se relajaron en la sombra. Maite (que tenía 7 años de edad) ha capturado los rencuajos, peces que se convierten luego en las ranas.

Los truenos eran muy fuertes y miramos las nubes y lluvia.

Cominos un almuerzo de comida ecuatroiana traditional, que era delicioso. Después de la casa que estaba limpia, elegimos las manzanas de los árboles de Gloria. Johnny y Maite fueron más rápidos, mientras que yo era muy lenta. Disfruté del día con Gloria y su familia mucho.

Después, burt hizo salsa de manzana.

Applesauce



In case you had trouble understanding the diary, here's the English translation:

Glory and Adrian invited us to their country home near San Bartolomé to collect apples. Adrian was a very good driver and maneuvered around all the potholes on the road. The countryside was very beautiful.

I was happy to meet Gloria's best friend, Julia, and her family. Julia was very earthy and has a pleasant personality.

First we visited the home of the Gloria's brother, a doctor who lives in Spain. The cabin was very rustic and had natural air conditioning.

Applesauce

Then, we walked through the cornfield to the home of Nancy, who was Gloria's sister.

Her house was also very rustic, with adobe walls and dirt floors. I was surprised that the bathroom was modern and a great contrast to the house.

I was happy to meet Gloria's family, because they welcomed strangers.

The women cooked while the men relaxed in the shade. Maite (who was 7 years old) captured tadpoles.

The thunder was very loud and we watched the rain and clouds.

We ate a traditional, Ecuadorian meal that was delicious. After the house was cleaned, we picked the apples from Gloria's trees. Johnny and Maite were faster, while i was very slow. I enjoyed the day with Gloria and her family.

Afterwards, Burt made applesauce with the fresh apples.

Cajas – Lake Zorrocucho

Cajas – Lake Zorrocucho



Today Evelyn went painting with Alberto Soriano again, and I tagged along with my camera. We went to Lake Zorrocucho this time. While walking around the periphery of the lake, there were plenty of photographic opportunities for me, though I had left the "right equipment" back in the car...

Cajas – Lake Zorrocucho



Evelyn and Alberto set up in a little shelter across the lake, while I continued to hike and explore. It was cold at 10,300 ft, so I put on my ski hat and fingerless gloves (letting me still control the camera).

Cajas – Lake Zorrocucho



This is definitely a target rich environment for both photography and painting. We are planning on returning next week, and this time I will carry that tripod that is so necessary in the darker parts of the forest!

, April 7, 2014

[Art, Evelyn, Photography](#)

High End Apartment Rental

High End Apartment Rental



The "New Cathedral" is a constant sight from our living room window, but during a few celebrations during the year, it is lighted in the evening, giving us a new nighttime view. Technically the Foundation Day celebration doesn't start till tomorrow, but a few events jumped the gun and started tonight. Lighting of the cathedral was one of those unexpected benefits.

There is a lot of construction going on in Cuenca. Since Cuenca has the fastest growing middle class in Ecuador, and Ecuador has the fastest growing middle class in Latin America, such construction is not really surprising. Much of the new construction is aimed at upwardly mobile Cuencanas, or towards Ecuadorians returning from overseas ([an estimated 3 million Ecuadorians work overseas](#), of which an estimated 500,000 have returned to Ecuador in the past 5 years). An estimated \$1.7 Billion (with a 'B') is sent home by Ecuadorians living overseas every year, which is second only to Oil as a major contributor to GDP.

High End Apartment Rental



At any rate, there are a lot of new construction going on in the outskirts of Cuenca. Within El Centro (where we live), The [declaration of the center of town as a World Heritage Site](#) means it is not allowed to change the external facade of a building, or to modify the skyline. This means that many buildings are having the internals gutted and transformed into luxury apartments, either for rental or purchase. Tonight we attended the grand opening of a very nice set of 14 apartments intended for medium stay -- no shorter than one month.

High End Apartment Rental



The rooms are quite nice, the general accommodations glorious, and the prices reasonable -- at least to those of us hailing from North America.



Foundation Day

Foundation Day



Cuencanas take any excuse to celebrate, and they don't limit their holidays to just one day. This weekend is an example, commemorating Foundation Day. This is the day (celebrated for four days...) that marks the time 457 years ago that the Spanish declared Cuenca a city. As in North America, there are a few purists that take pains to point out that the Canaris settled this location more than 1500 years ago, just as some people like to note that Columbus did not "discover" North America, since it was settled by the American Indians long before. Regardless, this is the demarcation of the European settlement of The New World. For Good or Evil, it led to our being here today, and thus is marked by parades, fireworks, and general merrymaking.

Foundation Day



Vendors lined a main street (Doce de Abril -- AKA April 12) selling portraits, food and crafts. Other groups danced in one square or another, demonstrating their ancestral heritage and entertaining crowds that gathered around.

Foundation Day



Foundation Day

Kids got involved too. The younger ones participated in a potato sack race (above), while teenagers competed in dance and singing contests. It was fascinating to watch these singers and realize that some of them definitely had the talent to be tomorrow's teen idols. These were not the High School talent shows I remember from the States. These kids were extremely talented and a lot of fun to watch. The audience played their parts too, with the boy dancers cheered by screaming teenage girls, and the girl performers met with equal enthusiasm by the teenage boys in the audience.



Foundation Day - MindStormPhoto Blog and Gallery

In the evening, we wandered over to Parque Calderon, and found a (free, of course!) rock concert in full swing. The voices were superb, and many in the audience were lip syncing the songs, indicating they knew the songs by heart. One of the biggest surprises was seeing all the musicians turned out in full suits. These performers were clearly adored by the audience, but there was none of the punk rock rebellion we come to expect in the States. The audience went from toddlers to parents (with their kids) to grandparents, with a very few gringos in the mix, and everyone seemed to love the music. Unfortunately, the volume got cranked up further and further until we left because it was too painful to be within a block of the speakers. Seems one aspect is being copied from the concerts in the States...

, April 13, 2014

[Art](#), [Ecuador](#), [Event](#), [Festival](#), [Fireworks](#)

Palm Sunday and Cajas Art

Palm Sunday and Cajas Art



Today was Palm Sunday for the Catholics in town, but we started the day by returning to Lake Zorrocucho in the Cajas, where we spent last Sunday. Alberto drove us there again, and then Evelyn painted en plein air. We were joined this time by Shimi -- an artist friend from Danville, back in the San Francisco Bay Area, who joined us for a few days.

Palm Sunday and Cajas Art



While Shimi and Evelyn painted, Stephen and I walked the periphery of the lake again, this time with a tripod and flash, which allowed me to take photographs I was happier with than last week. Along the way, we came across several fishermen (yes, always males...) working the lake and accompanying streams looking for dinner. I never saw anyone catch any fish, but I rarely hear of fishermen talking about the fish as much as about the lakes and streams...

Palm Sunday and Cajas Art



This is the painting that Evelyn worked on for a couple of hours until the chill chased us off to lunch.

Lunch was a minor adventure in itself. We went to a small Sunday Brunch place sitting at 11,890 ft elevation. Just going from the car to the restaurant (a short climb up some steps) left me light headed. There was no chance I was going to hike around that lake!

As we were eating brunch (a delicious trout that was probably swimming in the lake that morning), we heard a WHOOMP! We looked around, wondering if an earthquake had hit. Then the owner came out calling "Out, quick!" (in Spanish of course, but the meaning was clear). Everyone rushed out, while I gathered my camera and coat and sauntered out (I've been in lots of earthquakes before, and knew it was already too late to be worried). After a couple of minutes, we were told to return to our meals. Turns out the Whoomp we heard was actually a propane explosion in the kitchen. *Toto, I Don't Think We Are Not In Kansas Anymore!*

Palm Sunday and Cajas Art



When we returned to town, we found a parade going down a street about a block from our condo. This was a Palm Sunday parade, with some people celebrating the triumphant return of Jesus on a path of palm leaves (hence the term "Palm Sunday" celebration), while others jumped the gun and paraded as Jesus carrying his cross down the streets (should be a week from now, but who's keeping track?).

Palm Sunday and Cajas Art



We had heard of these robed penitents parading through town at Palm Sunday, but had not seen it before now. There are a couple of towns in Ecuador that are famed for such costumed parades, and all references we read said that "every town in Ecuador has them." It was just up to us to find them. As luck would have it, this parade near our condo had several small groups in variants of the hooded costumes, in different shades of purple. We finally got to see them without going into other parts of Ecuador (which we will likely do in future years, but this year is pretty full with travel plans already).

Semana Santa

Semana Santa



Semana Santa

Ecuador is a very Catholic nation, and Cuenca is a city with numerous free concerts and symphonies. It is therefore no surprise that there have been a series of symphony concerts all week, each at a different church. Tonight we attended one at "The Old Cathedral" on Parque Calderon. We arrived a little late and were actually the last couple allowed to enter. Guards kept the remaining crowd outside, since the church was filled beyond normal capacity. A youth choir joined the orchestra for much of the performance.

(For our Northern friends, "Semana Santa" is the Spanish term for "Easter Week")

, April 18, 2014

[Event](#), [Festival](#), [Music](#)

Viernes Santo

Viernes Santo



Viernes Santo

Today is **Good Friday** ("Viernes Santo" in Spanish) in the Christian religion, which commemorates the day on which Jesus was crucified on the cross. Many Catholic churches in town had small parades where a statue of Jesus on the cross was taken around the neighborhood. *Iglesia La Merced* is one such church, about a block from our condo, so we went to watch and document.



The crowd was small, maybe around 50 or so marchers. At first we were surprised at the small turnout, but then realized that each of the 50+ churches in town was doing the same thing, so the participants were scattered. The weather was threatening rain, which probably also reduced the participation, though we never got more than a light drizzle until everyone was over.

Viernes Santo



Several homes along the parade route put out small altars in celebration of Easter. The priests leading the march stopped at each one, made a small speech and then blessed them, before moving on.

Viernes Santo

There was to be another parade in the evening. We went back to watch that also, but it was running late and the rain was starting to really come down, so we quick-stepped the block back home to avoid the coming deluge. No sooner did we reach our front door than the sky opened, and it poured for the next several hours.

[PS: The next day the river was swollen and running fast, which was a nice relief from the sparse rain and low river of the past few months.]

, April 19, 2014

[Art, Event, Festival](#)

Futbol Pandemonium

Futbol Pandemonium



I have gotten into the habit of always carrying a small camera with me around Ecuador (for those interested, it is a Sony RX-100 MK II). I never know when I will turn a corner and run into something going on that I hadn't expected. Today was a typical example of that. We started off going to Kywi (a large Cuenca hardware store) for some items we needed around the house. About a block away, we started hearing drums, and then trumpets, and changed direction to see what was happening.

Futbol Pandemonium

We discovered a crowd of young people standing in the square next to *Iglesia La Merced* (where yesterday's *Good Friday* parade started) and *Coffee Tree* (a popular local hangout). At the time, there was only about 30 people there. Since there was also about an equal number of policemen around, we guessed that something bigger was brewing. I asked one of the police (in my broken Spanish) what was going on and when it would start. I was told it had something to do with futbol (aka 'soccer' in North American parlance) and would be starting in about 30 minutes. We decided to grab a beer at *Coffee Tree* and wait to see how things unfolded.



Futbol Pandemonium

Soon banners began to spring up around the square. At the time this was going on, we knew only the barest outline of what was happening. This is the scourge of not speaking the local language. I can only dream of someday speaking enough Spanish to figure out details on the fly. As it is, we figured out a lot of after getting home and putting *Google* plus *Google Translate* to good use... These banners were from various towns and clubs near Guayaquil, and represented groups in town to support their team.

The Game

We found that this was a major game between the [Barcelona Sporting Club](#) and [Deportivo Cuenca](#). The Barcelona Sporting Club is the Guayaquil football team, which is in first place in the national standings. Meanwhile, our local Deportivo Cuenca team is firmly in last place. You can guess the outcome -- Guayaquil beat Cuenca by 3 goals. I read an article at the start of Easter Week, where the local bishop blessed the local team. He was quoted as saying something to the fact that *"God does not come down on the field and make goals, but if all members of the team let Jesus into their hearts, perhaps we can pull out of last place..."* Apparently Cuenca was the national champion in the past, but has now spent the last two years in last place. The blessing didn't seem to help...

Futbol Pandemonium

The Fans



The band piled out of the square and onto the top of a chartered double decker tour bus, and festooned it with more banners. Our later investigation found that the [Sur Oscura](#) banners represented a fan club that is considered the "main hooligan" of the Guayaquil team, and is well known for violence at sports events. Apparently the large number of police were not just there for traffic control...

Futbol Pandemonium



Futbol Pandemonium

Given that reputation, we felt the crowd was well mannered. They were certainly boisterous, jumping around like kangaroos while chanting their team song over and over (*everyone* seemed to know the words -- as we passed people on the streets, they would start to mouth the song too!). One guy was setting off rockets using a coke bottle as a base and a lit cigarette as a fuse lighter (that is him in the lower right above), but most were just having fun. We saw no liquor and no drugs anywhere in the crowd. The local newspaper said that the police were planning on [putting a barricade in the arena to separate the fans from the two teams](#) though, which sure sounds like trouble in the past.

As an interesting side note, the Cuenca Trash Patrol (my name -- not really sure what they are called?) was out in force in their blue coveralls. They patrolled the area, picking up litter as soon as it was discarded. When the crowd moved on, there was no litter on the ground, everything having already been picked up. I continue to be impressed with the effort the city puts into keeping it clean. Now, if only they could do the same for the graffiti that is taking over parts of town...

Futbol Pandemonium



Here are a few other photos I liked, but didn't seem to fit in other groups...