

The Lucky Traveling Umbrella

By

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There I stood, on a hot dusty road, rainbow colored umbrella overhead, waiting for transport. Nothing during training prepared me for this slowness in time.

A dot appeared on the horizon and I flapped my arm, local style. A pick-up skidded to a stop in a swirl of dust. As the 'polvo' settled, I closed my umbrella, climbed over the tail gate, to survey the crowd of friendly faces for a spot to sit, stepping between enormous bags of produce; rice, spuds and a sack of ripe-red tomatoes. I squeezed myself between two small dark eyed children, putting one on my lap.

The wind felt cool on the back of my head and I was glad I secured my long hair pony tail fashion. A new freedom flew by as I viewed bright bougainvilleas, waving palms and smoky clouds of dust. Two years, as a Peace Corps Volunteer, was to fill my senses, a far cry from my life in wet, grey Washington State.

In the great Northwest full of damp skies, I never owned an umbrella. But once in Belize, during training, I discovered an umbrella was a must. Many stores sold a variety of colors and sizes with wooden handles at low prices.

After moving to my small village, my umbrella of multi colors served many purposes: shade under a hot sun, protector from swirling dust while waiting for a ride to somewhere else and as shelter from the sudden downpours out of blackened skies.

My umbrella became a part of me where ever I went: except when I left my wonderful cover behind, just to 'lose the darn thing'. It seemed that I would constantly forget my companion, leaving it to rest when my hands were laden with goods. Usually, I left it somewhere in a cane truck, or in back of a pick-up, or on the local bus. It seemed a challenge to hang on to the same umbrella as long as possible.

But somehow my umbrella would be found and reappear mysteriously, thus dubbed by the locals as 'Miss Perry's Lucky Traveling Umbrella'.

Days later, someone would run out of a thatched hut waving my lost bumper-shoot in peels of laughter yelling, "Miss Perry, Miss Perry, here you lucky umbrella! It

come back to you.” As I thanked them and visited, I would hear tales of my touring umbrella and the many hands it passed through, always to be returned once again. “Antonio see in he cane truck. He done give to Benito in he vegetable van. That van drive to Chetumal (in Mexico). Benito wife give a me next day.” It seemed that parasol had more excursions and adventures than I had sometimes. “Juanita see you left on bus from city, she give to Lupe in post office and Perla done bring to she home.”

One time my mysterious umbrella disappeared for about 3 weeks, being left behind in a family’s outside kitchen. It was happily returned to me with jokes of how lucky I was to get it back. This occurred when I was invited to a ‘fiesta de cumpleaños’, a birthday party, for one of my students. Other times, I’d even leave it the in the school gardens after class, to have students running down the road to return it to me, all with smiles and laughter. “Esta su paragua a afortunada!” ‘Here is your lucky umbrella.’

I had the same umbrella for three years while living in Belize. I felt lucky serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer, living among another culture, to share knowledge in a give-take relationship and to have my umbrella looked after by friends and families in this beautiful country. Everyone was watching out for me in a super friendly world.

I feel umbrellas are a must while serving in Belize, Central America.