

## Return to Ecuador A Journey of Discovery and Remembrance

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As a former Peace Corps Volunteer and father of a soon-to-be 6<sup>th</sup> grader, I started preparing in the spring of 2006 to lead a return journey to a country I had served in almost 30-years ago, Ecuador, South America. I had been discussing the idea of traveling to that country with my son, Anthony, his good friend, Avery, and his father. Dennis had also served as a Peace Corps Volunteer on the African continent in the country of Liberia, a place with strong historical ties to our country.

Imagine yourself as an 11-year old preparing to travel to a foreign country for the first time and then experiencing the reality of immersion in another world, one so different than your own. Ecuador's population is estimated to be 12,646,095. The population is ethnically mixed: 55% mestizo (mixed indigenous - Caucasian), 25% Indigenous, 10% Caucasian, 9% African, and 1% other.

While in the country we had the opportunity to return to the village of Cahuasqui where I had served in 1975. The route along the old Inca road had changed little since 1976 when I often deferred to horseback as a "safer" mode of transport. Recognizing and remembering my former life-altering experience was somewhat humbling -- where I had come from at that time to where I am at today. I also learned of a recently assigned volunteer to my former Peace Corps site whom I was able to correspond with prior to our journey. He had coined the term, "Island in the Sky" for Cahuasqui.



*On the Road to my former site of Cahuasqui, Imbabura Province, Ecuador*



*With my son, Anthony in front of my former residence in Cahuasqui*



*With Dental Assistant in front of Sub-Center of Health*

We journeyed to the coastal area of Atacames where the kids swam in the Pacific Ocean and viewed an uninhabited island (by humans) where thousands of birds were nesting. We also traveled to the town of Banos located in the shadow of the volcano Tungurahua (“throat of fire” in the Quichua tongue). This was readily apparent when we hiked to an overlook near the volcano and heard some deep rumblings. Subsequently a major explosion of the volcano occurred on August 16th sending a plume five miles high into the atmosphere with some serious after-effects still affecting a significant portion of the Ecuadorian population.



*Bird Island (Isla de Pajaros) off the Coast of Northern Ecuador*



Overlook (“Mirador”) Looking Toward Tungurahua Volcano

Finally, we undertook a trip to “El Oriente” -- the Ecuadorian Amazon jungle. We repaired a bridge, hiked to a massive waterfall in the pouring rain and experienced a journey in a dugout canoe in a raging river with a tarantula as our guest along for the ride.



*One of many waterfalls in the Amazon Jungle of Ecuador*

The entire experience was one of cultural impact, learning through experiencing the reality of another culture. Friends I had maintained contact with during this time were especially helpful in providing insight and adventure for the kids. I can truthfully say that the opportunity for discovery in a country as diverse as Ecuador is something that will stay with us all and, in particular, the kids for a lifetime.