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Person to Person in Ecuador

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Quito Ecuador- April 9, 2013

Field Notes from Abroad: Person to Person in Ecuador

Since I have been in Ecuador for eight months, I used the information that I gained explicitly from my interview and implicitly from what I have noticed. I was surprised to learn that my mom teaches Feng Shui, and since she teaches, she has also “cleaned” the house. This tradition comes from Asia, and is not very popular in the United States or in Latin America. It was interesting to see the little aspects that help the house to have good energy, like the mirrors over the bathroom doors to disperse the bad chi energy that concentrates in the bathroom, for example. Further, although this is not true of many Ecuadorian families, my host family strives to live simply. They have what they need, but do not have the newest, most expensive, or fanciest things. This allows them to enjoy what they have, but to not covet everything that they don’t have. I think that part of this perception is rooted in the fact that both of my host parents are psychologists, so they have a stronger awareness of the world around them than every day people.

One of the main cultural differences between Ecuadorian and United States society is that the USA is an individualistic society while Ecuador is very much a collectivistic society. This means that in Ecuador the focus is on the group, whether that be a class, a school, a family, or a job. Instead of focusing on simply what one person need, the goal is to make sure that everyone in the group is getting their needs met. This, from the standpoint of a US citizen, can seem to be difficult to achieve. I think it is a better way to look at the world, though, because it forces the individual to take in the needs of everyone involved, and make sure that the decision that is being made does not make life more difficult for

another family member. Another difference between the greater Ecuadorian society is the amount of meat that is consumed (my host mom is vegetarian, and thus does not cook a lot of meat for my host dad and host brother). In general, a typical lunch, the largest meal of the day, is a soup with meat in it as the first course, rice, meat, corn/potatoes (or sometimes both), and perhaps some vegetables for the main course, juice, and dessert. The meat that is in the soup is often not the same type of meat that is in the main dish. In the states, my family usually only has meat once a day, and if we do, we only have one type of meat at a time. Since I am a vegetarian, the amount of meat consumption makes it hard for me to go out to eat and to try typical Ecuadorian foods, since the majority of them contain meat.

The interview that I conducted did not profoundly change my view of either Ecuador or the United States. Perhaps this is because I have been here for so long, that some of the parts of society just seem normal to me now. Or, it could be that subconsciously I have been processing all of this information. What I do know, however, is that my stay in Ecuador overall has made me think differently about the United States. There are some parts that I miss a lot, especially being from Oregon: clean air, little air pollution, coffee shops/stands, changes in weather, vegetarian food, little noise, etc. Other aspects of the society, though, I have begun to question. For example, I have noticed since being down in Ecuador that the United States is constantly in war with someone else, and I don't understand the reason for that. Further, I have noticed that sometimes the US tries to "save" other countries, and by doing this forces some of the values, like technology, on other countries. Overall my experience in Ecuador has been an invaluable learning

opportunity, and I know that I will not return to the USA the same way I left; I will return as a smarter, more well educated, and cultured person.

Interview: María Guadalupe Alcazár (Host Mother)