



# El Clima Magazine

*The Official Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteer Magazine*

Community Art Issue  
April 2018



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**Peace  
Corps**

## Editor's Note

The resource there is never a lack of in Ecuador is its creativity. In everyday practices and artistic expressions, creativity is evident.

It's in the graffiti that engulfs entire buildings in the city centers of Quito and Guayaquil. It's in the weaving of straw for hours on end to construct a hat that holds historic significance in Cuenca and Manabi. It's the brightly dyed threads that alone may fray but when woven together form the distinctive skirts of the men and women of the indigenous Tsachila community in Santo Domingo. It's the music that echoes through the park on Bailoterapia night.

Regardless of site assignment, volunteers are surrounded by expressions of art. In this issue volunteers share how the art in their communities shapes their experiences and how some have managed to incorporate it into their projects and lifestyles.

We can't all be Oswaldo Guayasamin, but we try.

This issue also serves as a warm welcome to Omni 119, who arrived in country in January, and a fond farewell to Omni 115 who will be departing in April.

-Amanda Morales  
Administrative Editor

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# Faces of 119

by Shekinah Davis

“This January welcomed Omni 119 to Ecuador. El Clima posed a couple of questions to get to know the newest volunteers before swearing in.”



**1) What are two interesting things you brought with you and why are they important/special?**

I brought a Juju, which is basically a magical blessing wrapped in leather that you can wear. My Juju is for safe travels but you get them for a lot of things. Some people get them for good health, to stop knives or to stop a bullet (it's really expensive though). Supposedly the Juju's only work if you truly believe in them. A garden tool called a Dabo (not 100% on the spelling). It's a hand tool that a lot of gardeners used where I lived in West Africa. I like agriculture a lot so I thought I could get some use out of it here.

**2) What is one thing you are looking forward to about your service?**

I'm most looking forward to finishing PST so I can get to site and start meeting the people in my community. That and more street food!



- Casey Blake, Omni 119

**1) What are two interesting things you brought with you and why are they important/special?**

My Caribbean heritage is very important. People might think that Cuban and Dominican cultures are similar, but they have many differences. One thing, however, that identifies both cultures is dominoes. I love the game and grew up playing with my family. I found a mini set and instantly knew I had to bring it with me to Ecuador. Not only to remind me of my roots, but to introduce others who might not have ever played to the game. I also brought a note one of my best friends gave me. Anytime I'm feeling down or lonely I can always read this note to remind me of who I am and why I came



**2) What is one thing you are looking forward to about your service?**

I look forward to sharing ideas with local teachers and helping the children with their English using fun and creative ways .

*- Melissa Ortiz, Omni 119*

**1) What are two interesting things you brought with you and why are they important/special?**

My best friend took an MLK blank journal and filled it with quotes and individual messages to look at each day I am feeling lonely, happy, or inspired. It even has blank pages for me to write down my thoughts about service. This gift is significant to me in many ways, but the main reason is that I love to write about my thoughts in journals or letters; it's a way for me to center myself in the world. The other gift I brought was my kindle! I am an avid reader. I love reading different books such as fiction, introspective narratives, self-help, non-fiction; to name a few. My kindle keeps me engaged with literary works that I wouldn't read otherwise.

**2) What is one thing you are looking forward to about your service?** I look forward to being with the kids in the classroom. Each time I work with kids, I am inspired, centered, and filled with purpose. They are fun to be around and filled with stories that remind me of my commitment to youth development.

*-Javier Higgins, Omni 119*



# Tag, you're it

*By Sean Speckin*

Over the past several months I've gotten to know most of the nooks and crannies that make up the neighborhoods that surround my apartment. On the walk to the bus stop, it's common to pass by vibrantly painted houses, overgrown yet meditative flower gardens, and murals painted by hundreds of little hands. It's these small forms of expression in otherwise barren spaces that make Guayaquil so charming.



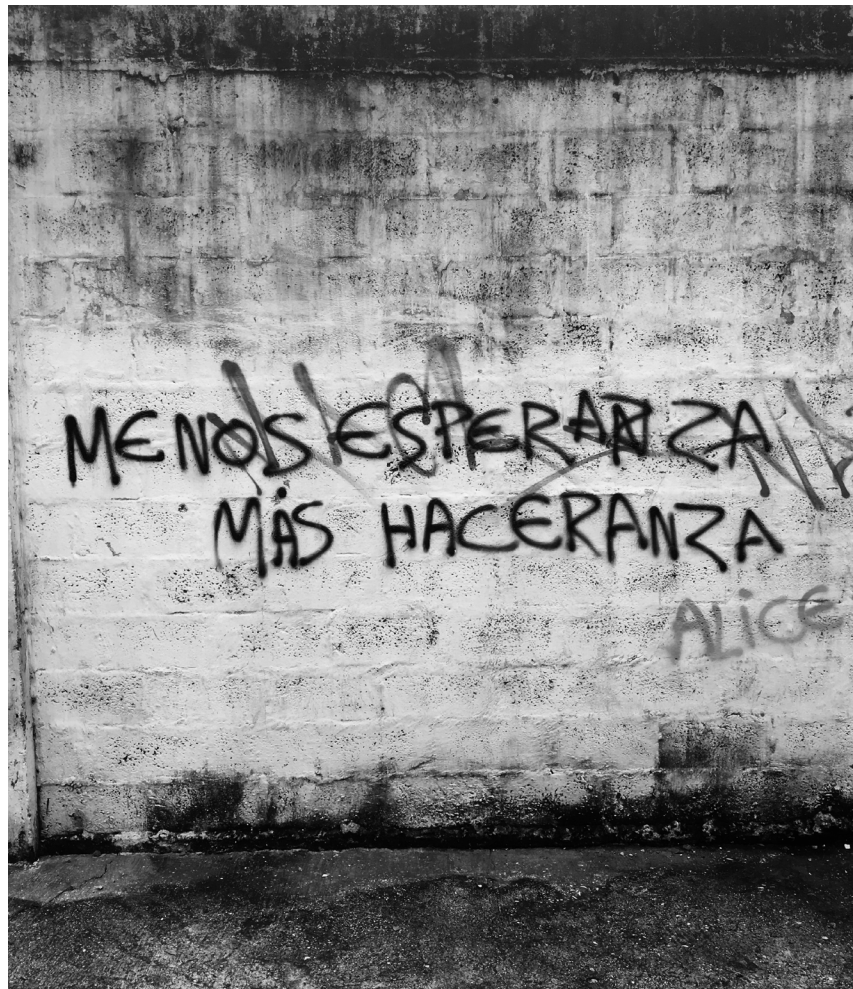
But it's not what makes the city beautiful. Beyond the paint and flowers, graffiti and tags mark the alley walls across the city. Some are meticulously crafted over many nights, long after the streetlights have flickered out. Others are hastily written messages that challenge any and every authority under Guayaquil's burning sun. In any case, they provide a glimpse into the complex beliefs, personality, and character of Ecuador's largest city.

My personal favorites revolve around simple mantras that blacken the peeling white cement walls of the neighboring parks. I can only assume these are the words of young rebellious punk rockers and the straight edge artists. Most of them are harmless yet emotional calls to arms; messages like "No to drugs, Yes to Punk" and "Together we can build a better world" remind passersby that the gardens and childish murals aren't the only works of art that bloom from the hands of proud Guayaquileños.

I spent much of my high school years listening to choppy, distorted power chords and the politically charged lyrics of punk rock. While the genre is often chaotic and aggressive, the punk mentality and the message it spreads is that of activism and compassion. From the outside, punk rockers are seen as troubled and entitled youth fighting for lost causes. Yet in reality, these artists rejected the lavish lifestyles of the preceding rock-and-roll age, opting to infuse their music with social accountability and responsibility rather than drugs and lust.

I'm reminded of those years when I walk by the blackened alley walls. To some, the messages remain unnoticed, while others ridicule them as ugly and divisive words. But when I see them, I'm inspired; there's a select few out there who reject the norms and the status quo, and look to incite change and social accountability with short mantras of discontent. These messages aren't exclusive to Guayaquil; they can be seen in the tight alleys and forgotten streets of cities around the world. Regardless of culture or values, Punk ideals continue to inspire a select few to incite change for the better. Though they may not be pretty, the meaning behind them certainly is, and the fact that the streets of Guayaquil are teeming with patriotism and pride alone is worth a visit.

That's what makes Guayaquil so beautiful.



# Jam Session

By Shekinah Davis

“Oh my goodness, these are so heavy!” I hear as I walk pass the man carrying two electric guitars (one on each shoulder), a cajón, and a tambourine between his chest and his chin. He is followed by two individuals who cannot seem to contain their laughter and sarcastic remarks. They are smoking cigarettes and carrying nothing but there cell phones. Eventually they rush to their friend and help lift the load. The laughter is contagious, the camaraderie infectious.

My band, along with several others, is headed into an event we look forward to every month: Museo de Rock Blues Jam Night.

Once a month all of Quito’s best artists come together and have what we call a Jam Session.

Guitarists, pianists, singer-songwriters, and music enthusiasts alike gather every instrument to be found and meet up to make awesome music. Some show up with their own bands, others come alone with an instrument and join other bands.







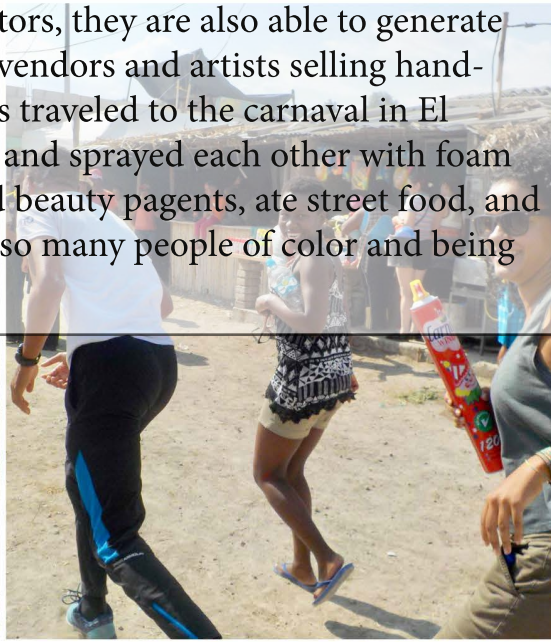
Sometimes two bands join forces and play popular blues/jazz/soul songs. Last month we had 6 guitarists, 2 base players, and a ukulele all jamming out together. It is a time like none other. We are family. It is a family reunion unlike any other.

I am a singer-songwriter based out of Portland OR. Music is a huge part of who I am. However, when I first came to Ecuador I didn't know that I would be able to continue with music. I wasn't sure that I would find the community; or perhaps I would find them but not have the time due to a strenuous work schedule. I am so lucky that neither of those things were true. This place, this reunion of musicians, is rest. This place equals swaying, dancing, laughing, and embrace. This is home for musicians all over Quito. This is the creation of art at it's finest, and it makes me so proud to be a part of this community.

# El Chota Carnaval 2018



Every year El Chota, an Afro-Ecuadorian community about 3 hours from Quito, host carnaval as a way to support their community financially. While entertaining visitors, they are also able to generate income for local families. Around 120 booths are installed for food vendors and artists selling hand-made art and souvenirs. This year a group of Peace Corps volunteers traveled to the carnaval in El Chota, and had a blast! We danced in a big field, played in the river, and sprayed each other with foam (as is custom during carnaval). We watched dance competitions and beauty pagents, ate street food, and swam in the river flowing through the town. It was beautiful seeing so many people of color and being immersed in such rich culture.



# Vámonos!

*By Arielle Benjamin*



Dance was much a part of my cultural upbringing as crossing between train cars while in motion, pepper sauce paired with every meal, and family prayers before and after school each day. So when I came to Ecuador, though I had to give up the latter 3, dance fit itself into my carry-on, and I have found ways to unpack him wherever I go. Dance is the gift that keeps on giving.

During Pre-Service Training trips to Otavalo, Valle del Chota, Ancóncito, and finally my soon-to-be site of Paján, I was exposed to four distinct communities highlighting indigenous, afro, mestizo & montubio expressions of Ecuadorian culture. Though foods varied, language and dialects diversified, and traditions differed.



Dance represented these identities and welcomed us - the outsiders - into their worlds. With a drum beat, the strum of a guitar, and possibly a lead singer, we were led into their tradition with hand claps, foot stomps, hip sways and lots of laughter.

I felt the joy strip away my inhibitions, create comfort in my spirit and a rest in my soul.

In my work at site, I have incorporated the freedom that dance brings into my quest to promote health and wellness. I was blessed on arrival to discover a bailoterapia club, a group that uses dance combined with aerobic exercise to keep people moving, sweating to the beat of popular Latin tunes.

I quickly got involved, having been active in “dancercise” in the United States, and began creating choreography as well as teaching classes. I was asked to help our club perform at a district competition for Manabí province, where 20 of us represented our beloved cantón on a bigger stage.

Since the experience in November, I have become one of the leaders in the bailoterapia club, determined to connect the joy of dance with the importance of health in my community. I am helping to start new bailoterapia clubs in other parts of Paján, helping others see the power in utilizing culture to benefit mind, body and spirit.

In my opinion, there’s no better way to do it than shifting our hips, waving our hands, and shouting into the night sky, “Vámonos!”

# Visual Storytelling

by Nathan Axdorff



When people think of Ecuadorian art and culture, many think about the indigenous population and the historical art styles of the Andean region.

However, there are many contemporary Ecuadorian artists who have adopted a mixture of art styles from other areas of the world. Take the case of Takeru Villegas, 26, a graphic designer in Guayaquil. Villegas fuses his passion for literature, animation, comics and cartoons into his own style of art.

With a degree in graphic design and communication from the Universidad Casa Grande, Villegas works freelance with the agency, Generamedios in Guayaquil and has launched his own illustration brand, “Take(a)Look.” He focuses on visual communication strategies for the businesses and people working with him.

Through sculptures, social media pieces and illustrations, Villegas produces packaging designs, editorial work and advertising for different companies. It’s his personal belief that design is used as art, but also as communication combining aesthetics and functionality.

“The challenge is to find the right balance of artistic aesthetic and product functionality,” Villegas said. “Ultimately, I want the client to be happy with the product, but also for the product to inspire something in those who interact with it,” Villegas said. “It’s like being in love; at the beginning you might be attracted by their eyes, face or body, but when you get intimate, personality matters as well.”

In his spare time, Villegas works as a volunteer and coach for Descubrir, a “transformational coaching” or goal-oriented life coaching. This idea drives Villegas in his design work as well. He says that helping people reach their goals is one of the most rewarding parts of life.

“Nowadays, it’s important to be conscious that we live in a globally connected world,” Villegas said. “Which is great, because now we can learn about different arts, cultures, and perspectives. It’s a huge opportunity to learn through connection, there are plenty of things to do, always new ideas, as well as ways to be amazed. That’s why my job as a designer is to translate what you want into something that works and so people can relate to it visually.”

One personal goal of Villegas to promote social inclusion for the LGBTQ community. He uses his designs to promote acceptance. He currently is designing all social media and graphic material for the production of “Un Dia Nico Se Fue” translated to “One Day Nico Left,” an Argentine musical about a gay couple that breaks apart.

There is difficulty with sponsorship for this event due to the stigma in Ecuador about LGBTQ rights. Villegas hopes to inspire positive change in his country through this production.

If you would like to make a donation to help make this production possible, please connect with Villegas in the contact information.

