

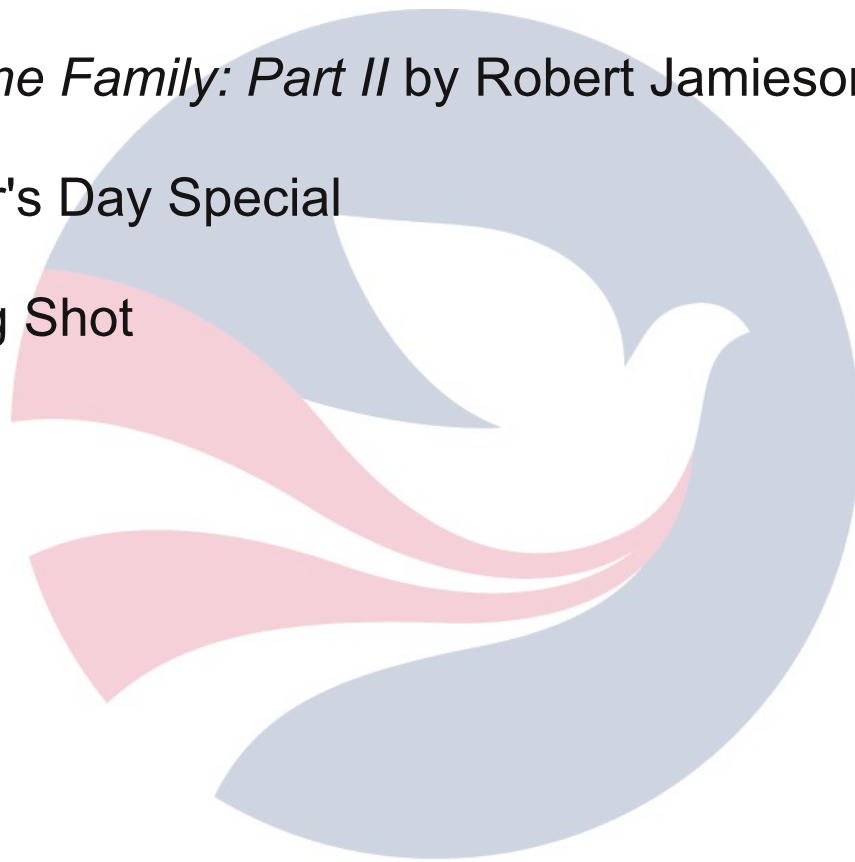
# El Clima Magazine

The Official Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteer Magazine

May 2017  
**The Family Issue**



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Peace Corps

# Editor's Note

We at El Clima chose family as a theme for a multitude of reasons. As Peace Corps volunteers, we are often leaving the comforts and support systems of our families in the United States only to be surprised with an array of “new” family members. Upon arrival in Ecuador, the first three months are spent with a host family, whose teaching responsibilities include the language, safety precautions, and culture. These families often go beyond these basic goals and provide friendship, support, and love in a very short period of time. Then it is off to site, and to the chagrin of many volunteers, to spend the next six months with a new family. Oftentimes volunteers are put off by this because they want independence or they don't think they can possibly replace their first host family, but in the end it's for our own good. These Ecuadorian family members become our lifelines in big cities, entrance into rural communities, and even potential counterparts on projects. Because, regardless if we have lived in Ecuador before, have family members that live here, or are exceptional Spanish speakers, we are still outsiders in a foreign place. These families are the key to our integration.

Now just as there are imperfect families in the United States, there are imperfect host families here in Ecuador. While some volunteers find a new mom or sister, others find a friend or at worst, a landlord. However, it is probably safe to say that many of us would call our fellow volunteers family. From the three months training with our omnibus or the two years we spend with site mates, these are the people we rush to share our tears or laughter, the people who we celebrate US holidays like Thanksgiving, and the people who over-share their horrific bathroom stories. These families are the key to our sanity.

Finally, we must never forget our support system back at home in the states. Many volunteers either visit home or have their own family members visit them during the two years of service. While they might never, truly understand our lives as Peace Corps Volunteers, they are eager to support our endeavors and offer whatever support they can give. Fortunately, through the gift of internet and smartphones, it seems like our families are never quite that far away. These families are the connection back to the United States.

So the word family might mean many different things to each of us as individuals, but collectively, without family we could not do our jobs. Thank you to all the family members that have opened their hearts and homes to Peace Corps volunteers. We wouldn't survive without you.

The El Clima team

El Clima is a digital publication written, organized, and published by Peace Corps volunteers for the broader Peace Corps Community.

**Emily Boyer**-Copy Editor  
**Melia Cerrato**-Administrative Editor  
**Courtney Evans**-Publication Editor  
**Devin Olmack**-Social Media/Recruitment



# Like no other

By Audie Cerrato

Few words can describe someone who allows absolute strangers into their homes. Words that come to mind are friendly, loving, and welcoming. How would we feel as U.S. citizens if adults came into our homes for two years? How would we react? Would we try to understand them? I would hope that many people could but I am not sure they would make that sacrifice. Because it is a sacrifice to welcome someone into your home and treat them like your own family. Our host families are expected to feed us, teach us basic cultural norms and language, train us how to manage the local bus transport, and ensure we are safe. However they often end up providing us with so much more than these skills.

I just want to begin by saying thank you to Mrs. Melva Becerra for allowing me to spend two years with your family. I am beyond proud to call you mother because her struggle has become my struggle. Her happiness is my happiness. Her family is now my family. She is family.

My Ecuadorian mother grew up in the mountains of Villaseca, Ecuador. When she finished her elementary studies, her father helped her move to attend high school in the nearby city of Machala. After graduating high school, she was accepted into the Universidad Tecnico de Machala (Technical University of Machala) where she would study sociology. Like many women here in Ecuador, she got married and had her first child; however she refused to give up on her studies. Finishing university while having two kids and house duties was a difficult journey, but she succeeded. She

worked for a few years at a pre-k school but when a third child came, she left work behind for the domestic life that was typical for most Latin American women during this time.

My wife and I moved into her house when only her youngest teenage daughter was left. Her husband worked as a guard in the mines and her other children lived far away. I spent much of my first six months sitting on the front porch, sharing life stories, and eating her delicious lunches just the two of us. Having grown up in a Latin household ruled by my Honduran grandmother and mother, it was easy to become her son and love her like a mother.

In doing so, our relationship flourished. The first time she told the neighbors that we were her kids, they all replied with, "HUH??" She would clear it up with, "Desde los Estados Unidos" (from the U.S.). That assured me that we were a part of her heart not just because we are the foreigners who have arrived and are the talk of the town. In actuality, she acted like our mother from the moment we passed through her door, and I had to learn to be a son and not just a friend. Those lessons my Honduran Grandmother taught me well, so I jumped right into being her "son". I swept the floors, cleaned the dishes, and other random chores to lessen her load as an "ama de la casa", or homemaker, the way my Honduran grandmother taught me.

In all, I realized that her adaptation was fluid and her acceptance of my wife and I was a breeze. It was little things from seeing us not eating rice every day and

asking, "Why?" to now calling us her kids. I guess that is the Ecuadorian culture at it's best, or perhaps it is just being a human being who sees us as different and, instead of pushing us aside, accepts us and wants to know us because of our differences. So the only way to reciprocate was to love her, which in turn taught me more so to accept others and adapt. Thank you is not enough and writing these words will never truly express what you have meant to me and what I have learned from you. I just want to say, "I love you mama!"

P.S. - The admirable Bruce Lee wrote, "You must be shapeless, formless, like water. When you pour water in a cup, it becomes the cup. . . . Become like water my friend."



Top left: My host mom tricked me into being Santa for our barrio, Machala Libre; Middle: Swear in Day! PCT to PCV with my host mom and Melia Cerrato; Bottom Right: Starting from top right- my mom, PCV Melia Cerrato, my host mom, and my host sister getting to know each other with a beverage in hand; Bottom Left: PCV Melia Cerrato and I with our host mom on her birthday



Left: I threw my host sister a surprise birthday party in my apartment with her family and friends; Right: My host family and I on my 27th birthday

# Three Host Families, One Country

By Courtney Evans

Like all Peace Corps Ecuador volunteers, I started out my Peace Corps experience for three months in Nayón. Everything was new: the culture, the food the people, and the language. We were introduced to our host families on the third day, and I instantly felt like part of their family. The first day was spent playing UNO with the youngest daughter, going to a state fair, and eating pizza. Basically, my perfect day in the United States now replicated in Ecuador. Being my first host family, they were the perfect introduction the beautiful Ecuadorian culture. They showed patience with my Spanish level, openness and eagerness to learn about the U.S., and constant encouragement when they noticed I was missing home. I am so grateful to have had them as my first host family and the goodbyes were definitely difficult.

When I arrived to my site in Pasaje, I lived with a host family that consisted of two parents, a host daughter who was 29 years old, and her daughter who was 9 years old. I found myself a little stand-offish to my second host

family for the first couple of days because I loved my first one so much. But my second host family showed the Ecuadorian openness as much as the first. They invited me everywhere they went, and for the first three months I took them up on every offer. My host niece even liked to play UNO, which was a relief. My host dad, who is somewhat quiet and reserved, went to bat for me in the community and really helped show me around. When I was working in the local community and needing a space to work, he wrote an oficio, or report, and went and spoke to the Alcalde (mayor) about getting the keys to the local community center so that I could use the space for whatever I needed. They were proud of the work I was going to do and helped me jump through many obstacles that are normal the first six months as a volunteer. My host sister introduced me to a group of friends her age, who made me feel like I was at home. They made Pasaje feel like my home.



Like many Peace Corps Volunteers do, I moved out after the first six months with my host family. I loved them so much but I wanted my own space. That lasted for another six months until I stole another volunteer's family after he had finished his service and returned to the States. He had lived in his own apartment below his host family, so I have my own space, but they still call me up for dinner or coffee a few times a week. I forgot how much living with a host family really connects you with your community, makes you feel safer, and more at home. They helped me organize an English group that meets a couple times a week on our street (on my porch) and they introduced me to everyone they know. They have taken me to weddings, and I celebrated Carnival with them. Pasaje is a fairly big city but having them and my other host family makes it feel smaller.

I know I could knock on any of their doors, and they would welcome me with open arms and have a place for me to sleep and food to eat. All of them offered different things but they all showed the hospitality and love that I have come to love about Ecuador.

Bottom Left: My Nayon host sister and mom at my swear in ceremony; Bottom Right: My Nayon host family and I at the festival in Nayon; Top: My Pasaje host niece and I going to spend the day at the pool



# Dear Liliana & Rafaela

By Devin Olmack

You probably don't remember the first time we met, but I remember it like it was yesterday. I had just moved out of my host family's house in Puerto Lopez to an apartment. I was overwhelmed with my new found independence but deep down felt a lingering loneliness. I loved being able to come home and cook whatever I wanted for dinner instead of eating a third plate of rice that day, but then who was I going to eat dinner with? I loved being able to watch a movie in complete silence without a screaming baby next to me or a soccer ball flying in the air, but then I found myself alone as I was laughing at all the jokes or crying when the beloved Marley passed away. I felt like I was losing the reason I came here, which was to spend time with people and learn their culture. And then you two came along. For about a month we just passed by each other, your house and my apartment just 20 meters away. We would exchange friendly greetings and that was all. Then one day, I heard a knock on my door. I opened the door a bit apprehensively and there, in front of me, stood you both. Liliana with a stern looking face and earrings way too big for your ears and Rafaela hiding behind your



Rafaela's birthday party

big sister's legs with tight curls rimming your perfectly round face. Liliana, you looked me up and down before politely asking "Excuse me miss, who lives in this house?". I responded, a little perplexed, by saying, "Well me, of course". Liliana, you then proceeded to ask me, "By yourself? Aren't you lonely?" I caught myself laughing at your question, the pure honesty and curiosity. And because you were right, I was lonely. I responded by saying, "Well, sometimes". A smile spread across your face, Liliana, as you burst out your next question "Can we be your friends?". But what you don't know is that you are more than my friends. Liliana and Rafaela, you have become my family in Puerto Lopez.

When I have a long day at work, it is your faces I look forward to seeing when I come home because I know your innocence about the world will make me forget any of my problems. When I miss my mom's warm, long embraces, Rafaela, you are the one I can count on to hug me until my bones nearly break and peck me with kisses like a chicken until I am completely covered. When I am sick and can barely move out of bed, you both run back to your house begging your mom to



make chicken soup to bring me for lunch. And Liliansa, you have dutifully accepted the role as my protector when my father is so far away by making sure I found a way to get into my apartment when I was locked out, keeping a detailed record of who and when strangers pass by my apartment, and ensuring my boyfriend always has the best intentions.

Even though you are seven and four years old, you are mighty, powerful, and have the ability to make me feel so loved. I can't imagine a day when I will come home from work and not see you running toward me, Liliansa screaming "Mi tia Devin" at the top of your lungs. I don't want to think about a day when I don't hear a knock at my door at 7am, for I know I will miss knowing it can only be one person. You, Rafaela, jumping up and down like a little firecracker with the biggest smile I have ever seen on a child.



Top: Visiting the park; Bottom left: Baking a pumpkin cake in my apartment; Bottom Middle: Liliansa and Rafaela and their favorite pose; Bottom right: Secrets

You now call me "tía" (aunt), but I am in no way related to you biologically. You include me in your family birthday celebrations, movie nights, and almuerzos (lunches). You cried with me when my dog passed away and laughed with me as we tried different foods, kale (for you) and cow's heart (for me). You two have wholeheartedly welcomed me into your family the past year and given me that irreplaceable feeling of belonging.

I don't think you will ever understand how grateful I am for our relationship. I appreciate you, Liliansa and Rafaela, for making me feel like I belong in a place where I am so clearly an outsider and for giving me the family I so desperately needed in Puerto Lopez. To you, I am forever grateful.

Un Abrazote, (a hug to you both)  
"tia" Devin



# The **BIG** blessing of a **BIG** family



My host mom Ligia and I enjoying my first Carnaval together.

By Emily Boyer

I remember a little over a year ago landing in Ecuador and being super nervous about meeting my host family in Nayon. My personality leans heavily towards introversion and privacy, so the thought of sharing a house, a bathroom, meal times, and daily life with a strange family made me incredibly nervous. I had no idea how I was going to find a way to fit in, as a stranger, in a family unit that was probably very united. Forming human relationships at the beginning tends to be, in general, a little challenging for me.

I will never forget the moment that they announced who my host family was. You see, I come from a very small family in the United States. I only have 1 set of grandparents, a handful of cousins, a handful of aunts and uncles, my mom, and my brother. But my Nayon family is HUGE, and I am only talking the immediate family. There are parents and four children, but in that moment when Peace Corps staff announced my family, I didn't see the largeness of my new family. All I saw were smiling faces ready to welcome me into their home and into their hearts.

However, I awkwardly stood there for a moment looking around to see who would claim that super nice family because I was nervous and forgot my own name. Then, after I realized that it was in fact my host family, I awkwardly and shyly walked towards them. They all gave me huge hugs. My brother Mateo was holding a big sign that they had made that said "Bienvenida!", which means welcome.

Over the next 3 months, as we spent a lot of time together, I became very close with my family. I was excited to go home every day, hang out with them. My favorite time of the day quickly became dinnertime, not just because I was hungry either. It soon became the custom of my host mom, dad, and I to spend extra time after dinner just sitting at the dinner table talking. We either talked about our days, some controversial topic, or a custom from the United States or Ecuador. Just having that time that they set aside especially for me made all the difference. My host mom would even set aside time on the weekends when she



Left: A family photo that took 8 tries to get right; Middle Left: Mateo and I out and about in Quito; Middle Right: Sami, Domi, Mateo, and I posing for a family picture; Right: The family braving heights and taking a picture to prove we did.

was able to teach me and my friends how to cook Ecuadorian dishes. My favorite was when we made empanadas and ate them warm with coffee. It's those little moments and seemingly small activities that really shaped my time during training and still bring a smile to my face when I think about them.

Leaving my family to go to site was extremely difficult. The evening after the graduation ceremony was so emotional. My family all gathered around and made speeches. My dad, being a carpenter, made me a clothes hook with my name on it. He also made photo frames, and my sisters had collected pictures of the family and me to place in them. One of my sisters even made a speech in English. She did so well, and I was so proud of her. But the most emotional good-bye was with Mateo, my brother.

He and I are really close. He just hugged me and cried. That was when I lost it. I never imagined in such a short amount of time that people could go from being strangers to people that I love, care for, and rely on.

To this day, I know my family is there for me. They are the ones I call when I have a bad day and need someone to talk to. I know that they will always support me and guide me. I haven't been able to visit as much as I would like, but even just knowing that they are there always helps me through those difficult moments, we have as Peace Corps Volunteers. I am so grateful to have been placed with them and I consider myself extremely lucky. They really do make living away from my biological family so much easier. I truly consider them my family.

# Familia, Family, Ayull

By Guisel Hernandez

"Families are like branches on a tree, we all grow in different directions, yet our roots remain as one."

After completing my last semester in working towards my bachelor's degree, I spent my summer in Oaxaca, Mexico with my family to visit my paternal grandparents. They were all confused and especially worried about what I had gotten myself into. They did not understand what the Peace Corps was, and they were worried about the time commitment of 2 years. My mother's first response to me getting into Peace Corps Ecuador was, "Couldn't you find anything closer?" It was the same response she gave me when I told her I'd be

attending a university in Northern California 8 hours away from our home in Southern California. Meanwhile, my father's response was, "When are you leaving?" From his response, I could tell he was already planning the list of projects I'd have to help him complete before I left. My brother responded with, "No, you're not going". I could tell he was upset and angry that I'd be leaving him again. Except instead of a university for 4 years in the same state, this time I would be leaving for two years to a country he's never heard. My sister's response; however, was more congratulatory as she is the one who is

Left: Posing for a picture; Next Page Top: This is a picture of me and my host siblings on a visit to Quito's Historic Center with their signature sibling pose; Middle: In this picture, I am helping my host family make fanesca; Bottom: Familia Cardenas



supportive of my spontaneous decisions.

My parents' concern stemmed from the fact that the longest I have been away from my family was 5 months while I was attending university, and the farthest I have been away from them was an ocean away when I studied abroad in Europe. Now, I would be gone for two years on another continent, which would be especially hard since my parents depend on me to help them around the house with technology, understanding paperwork that needs to be translated from English to Spanish, or answering phone calls whose offices don't have a Spanish speaker. Nevertheless, my family was supportive of my decision to accept the invitation and remain glad because they understand my passion to help others around the world.

When I arrived in Ecuador, it still had not hit me that I might not be able to see my family as often as I would like or that it might be difficult for them to come visit me. As we were gathered outside of the training center, waiting to meet our host families, I was both excited and nervous. After having read the letter from my host family and a letter from a volunteer who had been with the family previously, I was



excited to know that I would have three sisters and a host brother, as well as host pets. I was nervous about how well I would be able to integrate into their family and culture. When my host family's name was called to the center, I watched from a distance their curiosity about where in the crowd the volunteer would emerge from. Then, my name was called, and as I approached the family, my eyes became watery. I could not contain my emotions because at that moment, it all hit me. I realized I was in a different country for two years with a new family and then I let myself cry, especially when I read "Welcome to the Family Cardenas" from a small banner they held. I felt welcomed.

Now, I am grateful and fortunate to be with the family Cardenas because, not only have they been a fun and loving family that reminds me of my family back home in California, the family has been a great support system during training. I have enjoyed our dinner conversations and cultural exchanges, and as training comes to an end, I realize I will miss them.

From these experiences overall I have learned that "families are like branches on a tree, we all grow in different directions, yet our roots remain as one".

# My best friend's visit

By Jon VanTreeck

It's hard to believe that I had not seen my dad for one year. My parents are some of the most special and important people in my entire life ... and to be away from them for so long has been one of the biggest hardships during my Peace Corps experience. Thankfully, I got to have one of my favorite people in the world come visit me not once but for a second time!!

Part of why I love my dad so much is that he is incredibly open-minded, and I truly believe I can tell him (just about) anything. As he likes to say, "I'm just about freak-proof", and that's definitely a Robert VanTreeck saying. Another one of my dad's best qualities is his listening skills. Since he is a behavioral health therapist/psychotherapist and world-renowned introvert, he has gained incredible listening skills over his professional and personal career; his exceptional listening skills also allow him to fully engage in conversation with you and never make you hesitate whether he "gets the point" or not. My dad is one of the most emotionally intelligent and sensitive people in my life. He always listens without judgment, validates your feelings with true empathy, and provides the emotional





safe space to share anxieties, fears, and insecurities. Last but not least, he uses positive reinforcement (particularly with me), which, in my opinion, goes a very long way in boosting self-esteem and self-worth. Really, all these are understatement for how amazing of a human being he is.

When I left the United States, I was making a commitment to the Peace Corps and certainly to myself to dedicate every ounce of compassion, work ethic, and service to the community I live and work in. My dad and I were talking last month, and I told him lately I was feeling down because I fear that all my hard work and effort will go unnoticed, especially since there are community members who STILL call me by the previous volunteer's name after nearly two years. My dad said I wasn't getting the emotional "replenishment" that I so strongly required and needed from my community. When I heard that, I thought he had never been so right before. I have literally never heard anyone say to me "Hey, you know what, we love the World Map Mural", or "That summer camp you organized was awesome!", or even just "Thanks for your service here; we really appreciate it".

As someone who responds to positive verbal reinforcement, I now know what it's like to live in a community and culture where that behavioral trait isn't found, which is why seeing my dad was so incredibly special, because he GETS it. My dad lived in rural Peru in the late 1970s, so he knew what it was like to feel like an outsider in a place with tough living conditions and the absence of first world amenities. He understands and empathizes with me in a way none of my friends can ever relate to, and because of his past living experience in South America, we have become even closer. My dad also congratulates me on my successes and says how proud he is of me, and that's the best kind of emotional "replenishment" I could ask for.

Previous page: Father\_Son bonding in Seattle during the summer of 2014; Left: Dad and I enjoying the horrible weather in Cuenca; Bottom: Saying good-bye in Quito....see you in Chicago next time, dad!



# Love, hugs, & a pug

By Marvin Bonilla

It has been a little over a year into my Peace Corps service and a lot has happened. In that time, I have had the opportunity to meet great people from different areas of the United States, but they are not the only people I have met. From the moment I arrived to Ecuador, I was introduced to my first host family, who for many reasons will always be unforgettable. Three months later I was sent to my site and for a brief moment shared a few days with another humble and kind host family. Sadly due to the earthquake that struck Ecuador, I was moved to another site and had to say goodbye. At my new site, I was blessed to have a loving new host family who accepted me as part of their own and made me feel at home in this wonderful country. For this reason, I wanted to share the stories of those who have made my stay in Ecuador not only heart-warming but also fun.

When Omnibus 115 arrived in Quito, we were shuttled to a small community called Nayón, where we would spend our first three months in country getting ready for our two years of service. While there, I was introduced to my first amazing host family, which consisted of two loving parents and their two children. Fernanda and Polo, my host parents, made me feel at home by including me in their family get-togethers, as well as taking me out to explore Quito and other surrounding places. I remember the day they cooked cuy, guinea pig, just for me to try only to find out that no one but my host dad Polo and I were the only ones that enjoyed it. Fortunately, that only meant one thing, more for both of us, because it was tasty. Another joy of the family was spending time with my host sister, Anaí, and her little brother Marcos. Having two brothers of my own, it was fun to have company with whom to hang out with and play soccer. I will always

Otto from my Nayon host family



cherish the moments we all shared and am glad I had the opportunity to meet them and have them as my first host family. After three months in my Nayon community, I was placed in Portoviejo, Manabi. In my new site, Ms. Estrella Alva became my new mother. Off the bat Gemma, my host sister, was super welcoming and invited me to explore and even work-out at the gym with her. My host sister and her husband were close to my age so this made it easier to bond. They were so helpful in showing me around the city. Sadly I was not in Portoviejo for long because on April 16th of 2016, Ecuador was hit by an earthquake. Due to this situation, I was removed from my site and said my good-byes to the Alva family. They wished me well and Estrella told me that I was always welcome back home. I was grateful for the love and kind words, even if we were in each other's lives for a short period.

Finally I arrived at my new site and was placed with a wonderful family outside of the city. The Lucas family received me with open arms and even though they had imagined the stereotypical "gringo" (White, U.S. citizen) volunteer, with a light complexion and limited Spanish, they accepted me. I am of Latino parents and speak Spanish fluently. It has been super cool visiting my host dad's banana plantation, eating my host mom's delicious food and also, instantly becoming friends with their pets. My host family in La Iberia has been so great with me that I don't know how to express it in words.

I have gotten the chance to meet such great, humble, and loving people that I know when it is time to return I will miss them greatly. I am thankful for everything they have done for me, for accepting me as a part of their families, and I hope to always have these families to return to in the future.



PCV Marvin with his host family in Nayon

# All <sup>in</sup> the family: Part II

By Robert Jamieson

I found that written on a crumbled piece of paper in one of my bags the night before I left for Ecuador. I had never really felt like I was running from anything or anyone until precisely that moment. And while that note might have temporarily put into question the motive of every decision that I had made up until that point, I am now able to look back on it and find some temporary source of amusement. The primary reason for that being, I have been able to affirm the keywords of that note. I can always come home. I have never been more confident in my entire life saying those words. Never have I felt more assured of the sense, that home will never be out of my grasp: that the comfort of a home cooked meal, a familiar smile, or the peace of mind from simply sitting in the presence of people that truly care about you brings, will never feel unattainable. The primary reason is that I came to realize that I was never running from home. I was running to it.

I have only ever written one other article for El Clima. I am not sure the exact date that the

Top: Celebrating with the host family; Bottom: Omnibus 113 having fun; Next Page: US family visiting Quito



article was written or published but if my memory serves me correctly it had to of been almost exactly two years ago to this date. My first months in my new home. It was titled All In the Family and it was a somewhat emotional synopsis of what an important part Omnibus 113 had come to play in my new life here in Ecuador. A list, if you will, of the quirks that made each and every person in Omni 113 a special part of our new family. A word that I had no problem using so liberally then and a word that has only grown stronger with my time here. I do truly consider every person in my Omni and to some extent every person I have spent meaningful time with in the Peace Corps family. I have had the privilege to call volunteers, Ecuadorian nationals, and traveling nomads, that I have met during my time here, the closest thing to true kin that I have ever known. And as I look back over the past two years, I mostly just find myself in a whirlwind of emotions. I am laughing at the jokes that will never cease being funny. Jokes that I either cannot retell because they are too inappropriate for this column or

because they were in Spanish and I just did not understand them the first time around but laughed anyway because what else could I do. I am crying because I am turning the final pages in a chapter that at some points I did not think there was an end. Crying that the most important people in this chapter might not be there in the next. Most of all, however, I am smiling. Smiling that we were right all along. That we were never running from anything but always running to something. Never running from home but to home. Never away from our families but to our families. I hope that a majority of the other volunteers reading this agree and that others who have never left, what they have always known as home, might gain the courage to discover a new one. I promise you they are out there.

And just I as I did two years ago I will be leaving a home and a family again. A home and a family that has given me so much when I find it hard sometimes to realize what I have given them. Yet as I search for hard evidence of what has been exchanged it really is quite simple. They gave me their love. Their no questions asked, take me as I am, love. The love that only exists between family. The only thing that I could ever try to give them in return was mine. For when this exchange takes place you will find a home in whatever places this life takes you.





I was very lucky to have my mom in December, and to spend time with my kids.  
-Aned Ladino

My mother raised and unconditionally loved two children. Then she let both of us go miles and miles away from her, me to Ecuador and my brother to the border of Texas and Mexico, to achieve our dreams. That is one of the greatest things a mother can do for her children, give them wings and then let them fly.  
Thanks, Momma Olmack. I love you, more!  
-Devin Olmack

# To all the Mothers



I love my mom because as an immigrant to the US in the 70s she joined the Army and after a lot of sacrifice and dedication rose to the rank of captain. Makes it impossible to whine about what I consider 'peace corps struggles' and forces me to be tougher than I would be without her  
-Kata Grossman

To the mother who supports me, loves me, and cares for me unconditionally. Thank you for being not only my mother but my friend, confidante, and safe haven lord knows I'd be completely and utterly lost without you so thank you for all that you've done and all that you continue to do. I hope to continue to make you proud and show you just how much you are appreciated. I love you momma. Happy Mother's Day to the worlds greatest mother.  
-Melissa Perez



My mother is the best because she is always so supportive of my goals and dreams. She constantly encourages me to be the best that I can and is always there to listen when I need her. Love you bunches!  
-Courtney Evans



*"You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them." Desmond Tutu*