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Not Far From Home

Serianna Pearson
Dominican University of California

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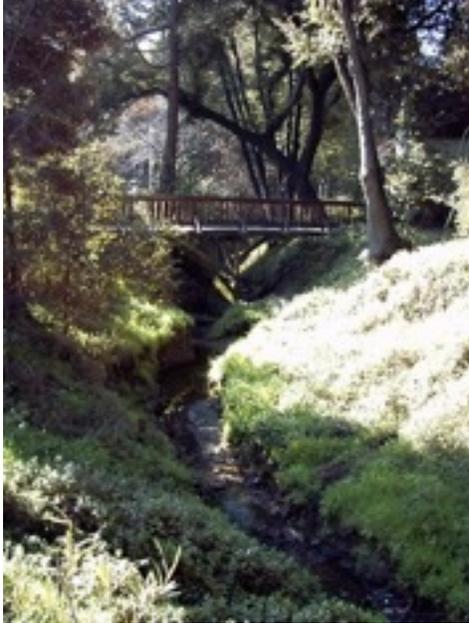
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NOT FAR FROM HOME

SERIANNA PEARSON



I flew out of the San Francisco International Airport with a group of essential strangers to travel out of the country for the first time. After a bumpy ride fully-equipped with a lightning storm, we landed in Quito, Ecuador. I highly anticipated this trip, collecting handouts and attending group meetings, but I was somewhat confused when, standing in the customs line, I saw two pictures: one of San Francisco and one of Quito, with a slogan basically saying “Quito, the sister-city of San Francisco.” Apparently, I hadn’t traveled as far from home as I thought.

Luckily, our trip wasn’t concentrated in Quito. We slept there for a little more than a week, ate there occasionally, and had a bus tour of the political aspects of the city. The majority of our trip was spent outside of Quito -- which is where the differences between Ecuador and California lie.

While the Bay Area is geared towards making money and having a rich economy, the rural areas outside of Quito emphasize hand-made crafts such as scarves, jewelry, artwork, and bags. Clothes are not for fashion purposes but for practicality, except for the vibrant colors woven to make them. The people of Ecuador sell their crafts anywhere they can: a marketplace where haggling is a sign of respect for the work being sold or rest stops where the items are laid out on a blanket for everyone to see. My favorite place where these crafts were sold was at the base of Cotopaxi, a volcano that is extremely cold. None of us were prepared for this cold although we were warned to bring at least one long pair of pants and a sweatshirt for the excursion up Cotopaxi. At the base of the volcano was a stand that sold gloves, hats, and earmuffs; all eleven of us bought one combination or another. Sadly, each item fell apart somewhat quickly, but I believe that was because we used them in such harsh conditions like intense winds and temperature not to be seen in any June month I’ve yet to come across.

The colors of Quito were unlike those of San Francisco. There were many objects being sold that were painted the brightest of blues, reds, yellows, browns, and greens. A lot of landscape paintings depicted traditional citizens in some sort of celebration or simply farming and being with their families. My Spanish teacher, who organized the trip, and her daughter bought a toddler-sized chair painted like the murals we passed.

At the time, I thought I was too tired to be homesick on this trip. Our excursions were scheduled from early in the morning until late at night, never making time for any of us to be homesick. For example, at Cotopaxi, all of us were encouraged to climb the volcano. After another girl and I hiked a couple of yards through rough winds with rocks flying into our faces, we decided to go back to the bus. We broke out into a jog, and I slammed right into her on the side of the bus; she wasn't hurt and we stayed in the nice, warm bus listening to music for about two hours. After attempting to climb Cotopaxi, we went horse-back riding (in chaps no less) through fields with Cotopaxi in the background. Our bus driver got lost on the way back to Quito. Those who weren't sleeping were holding on for dear life because we were going seventy kilometers an hour on a curvy country road.

I have traveled since my trip to Ecuador, but I'm always more homesick in other places. I've gone on trips where there's always been something for me to do, like in Ecuador, but I was always wishing I was back in California. Maybe this is because I was in the sister-city of San Francisco, only a forty minute drive from home.