

Ali Valimahomed, '08

Piuntza, Ecuador

After months of anticipation, Amy and I embarked on a life changing journey to Ecuador. We lived in Piuntza; a small village located in the southeast province of Ecuador, on the verge of the Amazon basin. Previous to this trip I had never heard nor spoken Spanish. I think back on the first few days there and to this day I cannot begin to comprehend what was said to me. Every day I would spend a few hours making a list of words and phrases to learn and then study them. However, soon enough the language set in and I began to learn from conversation. Though the language barrier was trying at times, with some hard work, help from Amy and the generous people of Piuntza, I was able to gain an intermediate understanding of Spanish.



The center of town, the social scene, and one beautiful pace – the park of Piuntza.

My host parents, Doña Anita and Don Torres, welcomed me into their home not as a foreigner, but as a son. Proud parents of seven children that have since grown, Doña Anita and Don Torres

also house a few of their grandchildren: Christina (15), Jhoana (16), and Jenny (21). Carmitta, one of the warm and comical Torres's daughter's was also sporadically in the house providing constant humor.



My host family, the Torress', from top left to top right: Eletorio, Jenny, Carmita, Don Anita, baby, and husband. From bottom left to right: Joanna, ---, and Christina. During my stay I was able to experience a diversity of Ecuadorian culture; to name a few, we took part in a funeral, a bacheloret party (right after this picture was taken), a wedding, vaca de loca, the festival of the games, and a birthday celebration.

While we there we were put to good use. Every weekday we spent 6-7 hours a day teaching English to various age groups. In the morning we taught the younger children simple phrases and words. The kids were extremely eager to learn and they so much fun in class. Towards the end of class each day it became apparent that the children were becoming restless and we inevitably went to play. "Jougamosssss," they would plea, "jougamos". The children, as well as all the people of Piuntza, worked hard, but they also liked to play hard. Almost every night when it cooled off there would be games of "indoor", an adaption of soccer which is played with a smaller harder ball on a basketball court. If you didn't play, you at least came to watch and socialize in this warm community.



Early in the morning and ready to learn. Coping down notes at the beginning of class.



Leibor helping to explain what was taught in class. He would practice the words or phrases, repeating them over and over until he could pronounce them perfectly. Priceless smiles on the often mischievous little ones

During the afternoon however, it was the heat of the sun which glared down upon us and we would thus retreat back inside to work with 3 prominent women in the town: Maria, Carmita, and . Each of these women expressed a keen interest in learning English both for their own enjoyment as well as for business. Unlike the morning session with the children, they came to us with specific questions and things that they wanted to learn and we tried our best to help them.



During our afternoon sessions we would sometimes take a break and enjoy a sweet treat of sugar cane or cana. Here we are intensely preoccupied peeling the hard stalk of the cane to access the sweet nectar!

After a quick dinner, it was off to our final class of the day with adolescents and adults. The reason this class was held separately from the other three women was because most people were working at that time, making the evening the only convenient time.



The evening class.

On the weekends Amy and I would walk a couple miles over to the medical clinic in Guadalupe. There we would help out in various ways. This facility attracted people from hours away and was staffed by temporary international medical care workers. Twice I helped run a little workshop to teach young children how to properly care for their teeth, after which I distributed toothpaste and toothbrushes that we brought. When we worked in the clinic we helped to take patient histories and vitals as well as shadow the physicians. Although many patients had a long list of complaints, often they simply needed aspirin, a new bandage, or even deodorant. However, the time the doctors took with the patients, talking to them, truly exhibited the importance and power of compassion.



When we left everyone threw us a HUGE party that was even equipt with a DJ! It was a great time, but I was so sad for it to end.

On my Summer of Service I was privileged to live amongst these wonderful people. Although we taught English, during my stay in Piuntza I was also the student. They shared their culture with us and welcomed us into their lives. In this secluded part of the Amzaon basin one was able to escape all of the complications of technology, material things, etc and focus what is truly important, people. I will cherish and carry this experience with me for the rest of my life.



Jonner aka Chibo (or baby goat!) and I. From day one he was our best friend and he had the cuttest smile. I remember everytime that he got something correct he would pound on his chest like King Kong. Hahaha, oh Chibo.



Leibor and I. Leibor was very patient with me, always attempting to explain things for me when I didn't understand them... most of the time! As an older student, he also helped out in class.



The kids, Amy, and I. It was hard to get them to sit still, but they tried their hardest and we had a good time. This was such a great experience and we had so much fun.