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Sojourn in Ecuador

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WHEN we at Iowa State think of home economics, we are inclined to think of modern, well-equipped kitchens, clean uniforms and hair nets. We think of children under the observing eye of teachers trained in child development. We picture the interior of a home developing under the skill of specialists in art and textiles and of education students preparing themselves to teach younger generations.

When I started on my trip to Ecuador, South America, I believed that living conditions would be similar to those here in the United States. It was, of course, to my advantage to find things considerably different.

Having completed almost four years here in the field of home economics, I was conscious of such things as the art and crafts of Ecuador, their homes, children and food. There are many crafts of which Ecuador may be proud. Their weaving interested me, especially the panchos, shawls and fajas. A faja is a brightly colored strip usually about 4 inches in width and several yards long. In these one can find typical design and a display of remarkable ability for combining colors.

Ecuador is famous for Panama hats. The best hats are the genuine Montecristi Panamas which are made in the village of Manabí. The workers spend 1 to 9 months on a single hat. Other articles woven of straw are mats, coasters and slippers. Again in these one is conscious of their ability with color.

Peru, a country rich in silver and also in designs left by the Inca Indians, seemed to be the jewelry headquarters of all the countries I visited. Peruvians use a fine grade of silver but often their workmanship is poor. However, it is all hand made, and the animals and figures used in jewelry and pottery during the Inca period still provide interesting designs in their bracelets, brooches and earrings.

The homes of wealthy Ecuadorians are typically Spanish in design and so to us seem cold and unfriendly in comparison to the North American small, home type of house. The iron gratings on windows, balconies and iron fences around the house lend Spanish atmosphere. Interiors seem dark and stiff with formal furniture prevailing. In the small middle class homes furniture is scarce—perhaps a small table and a few straight chairs, no rug on the floor. The majority of the people are poor, living in huts with mud floors and often no furniture save a box for a chair.

Many of Ecuador's children live in filth, without sufficient food and clothing, education, love and care. An unclad child suffering from a severe case of worms is a sad but not an uncommon sight in Ecuador.

The diet of the common people in Ecuador is anything but balanced. It consists mainly of rice, beans, potatoes and bananas. Even in families of "name and money," a well-planned meal, such as we would serve, is usually only an accident. At the pension where I lived we often were served rice, beans and potatoes in one meal. A few of the Ecuadorian foods I found very tasty and fun to remember. Two which I especially liked were called umitas and chifles. Umitas are made by grating raw corn, adding milk, salt, butter and a little baking powder. Then a cup, made out of the corn husks, is filled with the batter and they are steamed. When served hot in the husks with butter and salt, they are delicious.

The chifles are Ecuadorian potato chips. Rather than potatoes, a special type of banana is sliced and fried until crisp. When served with salt they are an interesting substitute for American potato chips. Another Ecuadorian dish is seviche. It is made by soaking raw corvina fish in lemon juice and onions all day. It is served cold, often as a first course salad, with hard, salty, toasted kernels of corn. When it is not too "hot," I enjoy it very much.

Few Ecuadorian teachers are able to receive the advanced training possible here in America. Neither do they have at their disposal beautiful school buildings nor adequate equipment. Their salaries are barely enough for a meager existence, and their jobs are not easy. I realize now what a real discipline problem in a school can be, although the American school where I taught had only children from the wealthier homes because of the expense. In our school we worked with children from England, Canada, the United States, Holland, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Czecho- slovakia and Tripoli as well as Ecuador. It was enlightening to see these children study and play together, and it was amazing to me to come across children in the third and fourth grades who spoke fluently three or four languages.

At the Dutch pension, where I lived for 8 months, everything was very convenient and comfortable. After a short time there, however, I discovered that it was only through the combined efforts of three servants, a cook and a laundress. With modern equipment such as we have, the same work would have seemed light, but there manpower is considerably cheaper than equipment. Our cook used a charcoal stove, the laundress washed for nine people by hand twice a week and ironed with small charcoal heated irons.

Our pension could probably be compared to an international house such as we have here at Iowa State. The owner and her daughter were from Holland. A Canadian, working for the British consulate; a Scotchman, working for the Anglo-Ecuadorian oil company; a secretary from the American consulate; and another teacher and I saw to it that part of the table conversation was in English. The other two members of the group were Johnny, an Ecuadorian boy who had been educated in California, and Juan Jose, who is now at the University of South Carolina on a scholarship. Mealtime was one of the worthwhile experiences of which each day was full.

by Mary Jerstad. A home economics undergraduate finds teaching in Latin America an enlightening experience

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