

February 7, 2019



Dear Friends,

We greet you from our home on the far side of the Colonso River. We departed for Ecuador exactly a month ago, connecting with friends and colleagues in the capitol city of Quito, spending time in Tena making preparations to be offline for a while, and then floating down the Aguarico River for a two-week visit to the village of Zábalo. We were happy to reunite with Hiter, Irene, Mauricio, Toribio, Gladys, Andres and all of their children, cousins, aunts and uncles. And we had the unique opportunity to participate in the presentation of a new Cofán-Spanish bilingual Bible orchestrated by Ron and Sara Borman and a group from North America.

Many ask us, "How are you adjusting as you move back and forth each year?" We often answer, "fine." But a more thoughtful response is illuminated in Jane's reflection below:

Imagine that you're seated in a fiberglass canoe, floating on a coffee-colored river that parts the thick forest on either side of you, only days after engaging in the mad rush of the North American holidays and the planning and packing for a six-month trip. You wonder, "How can I allow myself to indulge in such a mindless, peaceful activity, knowing that friends and family up north are back to the grind?" That nagging question hangs over you like a black cloud.

We have recently returned "home" to Eastern Ecuador from Goshen, Indiana, where our church, our community of friends, our oldest daughter and my elderly parents live in freezing temperatures, protected by well-built homes and offices with heat. While in Goshen, I often awoke early each morning to record my dreams, while teenagers, startled awake by alarm clocks, dragged themselves from bed to face another day of school and other pressures which threaten their very lives. Today I am having difficulty reconciling myself to my peaceful, slow-paced surroundings.



We accompany Tarquino, Hiter and Irene Yiyoguaje on the Aguarico River

As our canoe left the muddy shore for the slow river current, I thought of those courageous, well-dressed youth who would never lay eyes on this jungle. My conscience roared louder than the out-board motor. Like me, you may reside in a prosperous and comfortable community that exposes you to disturbing psychological conditions and over-privileged people who live to work. Then what? What are you supposed to do when you travel from the land of plenty to the land of simplicity? How are you supposed to feel?

International travelers report suffering from reverse culture shock when they return to their home country. What if you return "home" every six months? After adjusting to a culture of excess, enslaved to clocks and cell phones, I'm suddenly back in a culture of feast or famine that depends on the whims of nature and wastes little except time.

I sometimes struggle to find meaning in either the fast or slow pace of daily life. After conversations that seem weighty with eternal significance, it's hard to come back and get excited about sitting in silence, surrounded by people who do not understand me very well, and never seem to ask my opinion. Yet after learning to be still, it's hard to go back to the analytical thinking and lightweight entertainment I grew up with. It's easy to feel confused as I try to reconcile what appears to be opposing worlds.

I take comfort in the words of the prophet Isaiah who centuries ago foresaw the peace that would come with the reconciliation of opposites. He wrote of Jesus, the coming Messiah:



Naomi with Analí Yiyoguaje

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.... for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
(Isaiah 11:6-9)

I have slowly come to realize that I will never reconcile all these differences on my own. God will have to do this within me, helping me to see that a black cloud that looms over me is not always a threat, but can bring comfort and relief in the heat of the relentless jungle sun.

May the reconciling love of Jesus allow each of us to embrace the clouds that threaten to ruin our days. May the Holy Spirit change our perspectives to one that is closer to God's, one that incorporates many parts into a unified and life-giving whole.

Jane, Jerrell, Naomi, Teresa and Jordan Ross Richer