



Video Story Transcript

What a Tall, White, American Woman Learned from a Small, Brown Andean Girl

By: Storyteller Pam Faro
<http://storycrossings.com/>

Link to YouTube Video:
<https://youtu.be/4inZcqt7sWY>

Note: The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, I'm Pam Farrow and the first time I went to Ecuador it was in 1976. You see, I was engaged to an Ecuadorian man who I'd met the previous year when we were both living in England. That's a story, but for another time.

I can just imagine what my parents must have been thinking and feeling when I came home from England and told them that I was in love with and was going to marry this, this, this liberation theologian guy from this South American Third World country and go off and live there the rest of my life.

Well... they... probably wisely, thought it would be a good idea for me to visit before irrevocably committing myself. And I did have two years of college left so it wouldn't happen till then. But that year, they sold our piano - I wasn't home that much to play it anymore. And they bought me a plane ticket to Quito for my Christmas break.

My Fiancé's parents lived in an Andean village called El Placer at altitude of about 10,000 feet and it was right out of my seventh grade geography book. umm hmm... There was no electricity, kerosene lamps. No plumbing. The kitchen floor was dirt. Chickens came in and out... and right out the door where the astonishing Andes mountains.

There is such a thing as culture shock. When everything is different, but I was only going to be there for two weeks and I'm pretty sure that I was the first gringa that had ever been in that village. I know that Mano was the first person from that village to have ever gone off to university and then overseas. So I was like something they had never seen before and I was a bit of a celebrity, I think. 'Cause every time I stepped out of the house, I was surrounded by masses of children. It was Christmas time, so they weren't in school and they would just come around me and Mano had so many people to visit with... he'd been gone for several years, and I couldn't really engage in the conversations I hardly knew any Spanish at all.

So I would kind of go around in this sea of children. And they were, they were laughing, and they were talking. Some were shy... some were really outspoken, but I couldn't understand what they were saying, and I kept finding pieces of hard candy in my pockets. Mano told me that at that time they hardly ever had any little treats in that village, but at Christmas time all the children had these little wrapped hard candies and I kept finding them surreptitiously slipped into my pocket. But I couldn't really talk with them.

But let me tell you now about Lijia or Lijita as most people called her. She was a girl who was... I don't know... she was maybe 12 or 13. She looked almost more like 9 or 10 to me. And Lijia kind of adopted me in that two weeks I was in her village and I don't know how she did it. I don't know how... with pantomime or gesture or using alternate wording after alternate wording or sound effects, but she always I mean always got me to understand what somebody was saying to me. It astounded me. It astounds me to this day.

And I'll tell you, I keep thinking about Lijia. That Lijita what a blazing example she was of patience, of persistence, of generosity, of creativity, of humor, of thinking outside the box. What a magnificent gift that bronze skinned, black haired, high altitude dwelling, probably barely educated right? So foreign girl.

Yeah but, I was the so foreign one. I was with my, my huge stature. They were all shorter than I. My, my rubio they called it blonde hair, was brown, but looked blonde to them. My, my fair skin that was burning to a crisp in that... that high altitude Andean sun and my, my sweat shirt and my jeans. I was so foreign to them.

I couldn't speak the language. But Lijita especially modeled for the others who tried to follow. And for me now. A radical welcoming. She helped and helped others to accommodate and include and it felt like they even loved me.

Lijita really showed me how to truly, sincerely, generously welcome the stranger – the Other.

The Other hope I can do as well as she did. Thank you so much Lijita.

Te agradezco de mi corazon.