

Marionette Workshop in Ecuador

By Joyce Gallardo

In July 2000 my husband, David, and I traveled with our children, a friend, and Dr. Basil Williams, an anthroposophical physician, to Quito, Ecuador. Quito, the capital city, is nestled in a beautiful high valley of the Andes Mountains, some 9,000 feet above sea level. Due to the high altitude, temperatures are spring like year round, even though Ecuador (“equator” in Spanish) straddles the equator. Each day we were greeted by crisp blue skies and warm, sparkling sunshine.

The purpose of our trip was two-fold: We visited David’s family in Quito and also spent two weeks working and sharing with the teachers of the Leonidas Proaño School, named after an archbishop who championed the rights of the indigenous peoples of Ecuador. The school is striving to be a strong and healthy Waldorf school; it has six grades and hopes to add two more in the near future.

We had already met several of the teachers of Escuela Leonideas Proaño and Nelson Aulestria, the school’s director, the previous summer, for I had brought a puppet show with me to the 1999 curative education conference in Quito.

It was an Ecuadorian tale performed with silk marionettes dressed in traditional clothing, and many of the teachers had asked me to offer a workshop. Although it was impossible to comply at the time, I offered to think about doing one the following summer.

Well it happened! As part of our visit this summer, I gave a three-day workshop on the making of marionettes that culminated in a puppet play. In preparation, I had put together 17 pre-cut dresses and hats, as well as materials for the head and stuffing, and packed them into individual zip-lock bags to take to Ecuador. The fabric for our marionettes was donated by the Christian Community in Boston, Massachusetts, and the lovely silks we used for the puppet play were donated by teachers from the Lexington Waldorf School in Boston and the Hawthorne Valley School in Harlemville, NY. The days of planning and cutting and creating at home, as well as translating “When the Root Children Wake Up” into Spanish, made for a well-organized workshop with the teachers.

Fourteen women and three men attended, and they created beautiful little flower fairy marionettes. Amidst much laughter, giggles, and warm expressions of gratitude, we created, played, and shared together. We started by learning to make the heads and body sacks. Then we dressed our fairies in the lovely multi-colored pre-cut dresses and hats. My daughter, Ana-Lucia and her friend, Sarah Elinson, both high school students at Hawthorne Valley High School, helped cut the strings for the puppets, translated, and assisted in various other ways.

The mood was light and joyful. I looked forward each day to going to the school. Finally, all of the little flower fairies were ready for our performance. We ironed the silks and created a “root house” for the root children and fields where the flowers would stream out when Mother Earth awakened them.

Seventy-five parents, teachers, and children crowded into the kindergarten room to see *la presentación de marionetas*. When the candle was lit, a hush came over the room, and the delighted faces of the children and adults were our reward for days of preparation. The first grade teacher read the story, and six others moved the puppets and helped them come alive to the delight of our audience.

I carry in a special place in my heart the words of Mery, the fifth grade teacher, who was one of my most faithful helpers during the workshop and in setting up the scene, as well as puppeteering, "*Gracias por darnos la oportunidad de ser como niños por unos días.*" ("Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be like children for a few days.") The creative child in each of us had been nourished and nurtured during those days we spent together, as happens for me every time I work with others on creating puppets and marionettes. How magical it is as they are ensouled through one's own hands, before one's very own eyes! The words of the Christ took on a new meaning as we later reflected on our experience together: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3)

On the last day of our visit at the school, Dr. Williams, David, and I were each given a beautiful hand-woven rainbow shawl with long, graceful fringes. They could not have known that I was working meditatively with Rudolf Steiner's Rainbow Meditation during our time in Quito, striving to see each one of them, as we worked together, as a rainbow—or could they?

David and I want to strengthen the spiritual bridge between North and South America and will return to Ecuador next July. There is much to be done, as the school is in its pioneering stage of development. The teachers are open, warm, and loving. They have much to give us. It is quite healing to come from the North and experience their wonderful heart forces! If you would like to visit the school and perhaps offer a workshop in pedagogy, music, puppetry, eurythmy, or movement, please contact us. And, of course, Ecuador is a most beautiful country to travel in.

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