

Aracely Arrives in the USA

I met Aracely Jumpa ten years ago. Our group of eight riders were on a bike tour in Peru going over the Andes Mountains and into a remote area of the jungle. Aracely lived with her mother and grandfather next to their roadside restaurant where we stopped for lunch. She was six years old and charming by bringing us oranges she picked from her tree near their house. Her outgoing personality helped give her a natural connection with our group.

When we were about to leave, her grandfather asked if we could take Aracely with us because they didn't have enough money to take care of her. I told him we can't just take children home through the airport, but I would keep in touch with them. He wrote down his address: The Yellow Restaurant, Near KM 58, In the town of Yurinaki. During the next six months we traded letters and I was surprised my letters actually made it to their remote location.

A few months later I learned that Aracely and her mother had moved 300 miles to the capital city of Lima. Her mother had a job cleaning houses and Aracely was living at a boarding home for girls which was actually an orphanage for girls from troubled homes. Aracely was lucky because she had a loving mother who would visit her often. While living at the Girl's Home Aracely needed to adapt to living with 15 other girls.

The following year I returned to Peru and tracked down Aracely and her mother. I asked them to join our bike tour and ride in the support van. It was a good way for them to spend time together and they enjoyed crewing for the riders. Aracely was perky and friendly and knew everyone's name by the first day. She was now seven years old and became good friends with many people on the tour. We helped Aracely start attending special English classes on the weekends. During the next nine years Aracely's English improved and she continued to travel with us on

our annual tours to all corners of Peru. She went on her first airplane ride, boat trip and train excursion. She has traveled to Machu Picchu several times, hiked for a week in Colca Canyon and traveled on many Amazon riverboats. She probably has traveled more in Peru than 99% of the local people. Her travels have given her a lot of poise and confidence which would help her academic success.

Aracely graduated from her local high school when she was 15 years old. She was a good student but too young to attend the University. We began to explore various other academic options for her. Aracely applied to be an AFS Foreign Exchange Student but she was declined because she came from an orphanage and was considered a high risk to get a Visa. Another option was for Aracely to attend college classes and get a student Visa. Thanks to the tireless work of Susan Rosenblatt taking care of the application paperwork, Aracely was accepted to the English Institute in Berkeley, California. Aracely would be able to attend the Institute for five months and visit the United States for an additional three months.

After a year of planning, Aracely finally arrived in the United States on February 2, 2016. She flew from Peru to Chicago. My wife Susan Notorangelo and I met her at the airport after midnight. It was a cold night and Aracely added a few extra layers of sweaters and jackets to ride home in the car with the heater blasting. Her first week was spent at our house attending several parties to meet the various people from the church who have followed Aracely's progress during the years. We went to Chicago for the weekend on a tour hosted by my brother Ken. We viewed the city from the 103rd floor of the Sears Tower. Aracely went ice skating for the first time and she learned to shuffle on skates. We also saw the "Blue Man Group" presenting their high energy drum and comedy show. It was a busy and enlightening way to see the sights of Chicago.

A few days later we were ready to start our drive to Arizona and the Grand Canyon. We were traveling on "Old Route 66" to get a feel for traditional roadside Americana. Our first stop was in St. Louis where we had a dinner party and visited with many of Susan Notorangelo's sibling's and families. They had been hearing about Aracely for 10 years and it was a nice chance for everyone to meet her.

The next day Aracely and I continued driving across Missouri and into Oklahoma. Aracely asked "What's the big deal about Route 66". I told her of all the American history that had traveled on Route 66 from the Dust Bowl migration in the 1930s and the military migration in the 1940. Then how the idea of the family vacation changed Route 66 into a tourist haven in the 1950s and 60s. I also explained how Route 66 was a baseline for dozens of other themes of American interests.

As we drove across Oklahoma we began seeing signs for the Cherokee Trading Posts. I told Aracely about the "Trail of Tears" and how the Cherokees were forced to march to Oklahoma. Aracely said "You mean you have Indians in the United States?" Yes, I told her, and some of them have lived in New Mexico and Arizona for over 1,000 years. We will visit some of their original villages when we get there. Aracely suddenly had an interest and understanding in what traveling Route 66 really meant. During the remainder of our drive we included many visits to Native American settlements along the way including Pecos Pueblos near Santa Fe and the Acoma and Laguna Villages near Grants, New Mexico.

Aracely considers herself an Indian from the Peruvian Jungle. Which she describes defiantly as never having been conquered by the Spanish when the Spanish were taking over most of South and Central America in the 1500's. During our drive on Route 66 Aracely would sign the museum guest registry with her name and address as "Amazon Jungle, Peru". One morning near the Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico we

had a nice conversation with a Native American woman selling her pottery from the trunk of her car. She told us how the various tribes of Zuni, Laguna, Acoma and Santa Domingo were related but also tried to maintain their individual identities. Aracely was impressed to talk with a real Native American. When we got back in the car she was also impressed that American Indians had shoes and drove cars.

As we continued our drive we were in search of the Best Chili on Route 66. In each state we would share a small bowl and rank it on a scale of 1 to 10. Looking for Chili gave us one more theme to look for as we traveled west. The winning Chili was actually at the Bright Angle Restaurant on the rim of the Grand Canyon. Their chili was spicy but not too sweet. The only negative was that it was served in a sourdough bread bowl that soaked up most of the juice. Aracely ranked it an 8.

We visited the La Posada Hotel in Williams, Arizona. This was a reconstructed Harvey House that provided elegant meals and lodging for travelers during the 1920s through the 1950s. The waitresses in the restaurant were known as Harvey Girls and they were recruited to move west and work at the restaurants along the Santa Fe Railroad. Aracely took an interest in the Harvey Girls and bought several books and videos about their experiences. When Aracely learned the La Posada was built by Mary Colter, who was one of the few women architects on the early 1900's, we began another theme of tracking down other Colter buildings at the Grand Canyon such as the El Tovar Hotel, Hopi House and Desert View Tower.

Our visit to the Grand Canyon was a highlight for Aracely. She thought it was amazing. We spent two days walking and driving to the overlooks along the rim. The trails were too icy to walk down into the Canyon but we still hiked for many hours up on top. We finished our tour by driving to Tucson and camping in the desert. Aracely was impressed with the huge Saguaro Cactus and other prickly

plants.

The next day Aracely flew to Berkeley, California to begin her classes at the English Institute. She will be staying with Gerd and Susan Rosenblatt for the next five months. They will be able to show her many of the sights around California. Aracely has been keeping a scrap book and writing in her journal. She knows her adventures are just beginning and it will be exciting to follow her progress during the next year.