

Drought and a Flood of Gratitude

Happy Thanksgiving from Copacabana!

It's been a weird week, and I suppose that's heightened our sense of gratitude.

Water Shortage

While the rains are increasing and threatening to flood our house, the entire village has been out of water since Tuesday, and the municipality isn't likely to pump water out to homes again until Monday, possibly later. There's a long-standing water shortage here, but this particular crisis is because Copa installed a colossal new water tank, and the concrete that will support it needs time to cure.



I'm quite a few days past due for a shower. Happily, friends who own a hostel in Copa still have water and are happy to "rent" me a shower later today. I'm grateful -- so is Jeff! We can still buy bottled drinking water in town, so we'll be OK. We're grateful for that, too. Alas, we won't be able to wash laundry or dishes for a few days. That's a little troubling ... but we can find a way to feel grateful for that, too! And we can haul buckets of water from the spring next to the Incan ruins behind our house, so, thankfully, we can flush our toilet every so often. They're hard to see in the photo, but along with little micro-lily pads there are tiny little fish swimming in those "flush buckets."

Bolivian National Census

Yesterday, Nov. 21, the Bolivian government conducted its national census, which occurs every ten, or eleven years. Thank heavens our friends warned us to buy anything we'd need the day before because everything, positively everything, was closed from 12:01 a.m. until midnight. No public transportation. No shops. No tourist sites. In fact, tourists, just like everyone else (except the national police), were effectively under government-mandated house arrest. No one was allowed to leave their property.



This sticker is placed on a home's security gate when the census there has been completed.

It was kind of cool, really. Streets were utterly still. From our windows we could see mothers braiding little girls' hair, men looking out their windows, and school kids playing with their younger siblings within the confines of their security walls. It reminded us of a snow day in the States ... except the forced confinement, which made us feel a little restless.



Above and the next "photo" are examples of the posters found around town preparing people for the census.

There was a knock at our gate. We assumed it was the census takers. But no, it was a neighbor bearing a young orange hen, which we all assumed had flown our chicken run. I thanked the guy, took the hen, and gently lobbed her into the run. Immediately our own two hens flew out of their nest boxes, squawking loudly at this freak intruder. When we tried to grab her to return her to the neighbor who'd brought her, she escaped from the run and chicken-stepped to our garden.



The dogs, Wawi and Suma, were supremely curious and eager to try to play with the little hen. We quickly corralled them, but by then the hen was distressed. She ducked under flower plants, dashed around corners, flew over our laundry sink and between our legs. Laughing so hard we worried what the neighbors would think, we finally caught her.

To return her, I broke "curfew," and happened to arrive at our neighbor's gate while the census takers were there. They didn't seem the least bit troubled by my presence. I explained to neighbor Jose, "She's not one of ours." He said he couldn't imagine where she'd come from if not from over the wall between his small farm and our garden. "But," he smiled, "if we don't find her home, we'll have her for dinner!"

The same three teen-age census takers landed at our gate about 15 minutes later. Some questions were predictable: How many people live here? How many bedrooms? Do you have a bathroom? What's your home made of? Some were a little confusing, not because

we didn't understand the words, but because culturally we didn't understand the intention. "Quien es el jefe de esta casa?" (Who's the boss of this house?). Hmm. We looked at each other. Our landlord, Señor Suxo?

"No," they said. "El patron. Quien es?" We looked at each other again. Our boss in the States? "No, no, no. Who's in charge *here*?" they asked. "Who's the *boss in your house*?"

We laughed. I (Deb) shrugged and told Jeff, "OK with me if it's you." Then the interviewers wanted to know his name. In Spanish Jeff sounds like "hef," which is only a syllable shy of the Spanish word "jefe," which means boss. All five of us laughed.



Except for police/military and census workers even the streets of La Paz were deserted and shuttered. Upper right is The Prado, the Michigan Avenue of La Paz, on Census Day. At right is almost the same shot of the Prado Jeff took on a typical day. Unfortunately, but obviously, we were unable to take our own photos on Census Day.



They wanted to know how much education we both have. When we answered, they all traded looks of amazement. Then they wanted to know if we spoke a language other than Spanish. "Yes, English. And a little Aymara." Again, looks of wonderment. "Can we read and write in those languages?" "Yes." They were impressed.

Finally, they wanted to know what we do when we have a health crisis. We explained how I found a dentist in La Paz who gave me two root canals when a crown went bad in May. In all, I made five trips to La Paz, two of them were emergency trips. Among locals, having a dentist or formal dental care is quite rare. It's unheard of to have a dentist *in La Paz*, who can *save* a tooth rather than pull it. The interviewers said "Wow."

Happy Thanksgiving, A Week Late



Friends we had over for burgers on the grill this past Tuesday

green bean casserole, and pecan pies. We are inviting all of our Bolivian friends, for whom we are so very grateful, to join us. It will be a lovely day.

Early Sunday morning, we'll be welcoming two more Americans, the sister and brother-in-law of Ryan Kolegas, who's been volunteering with the mission since August, teaching English in a nearby rural school. So we can share our Thanksgiving celebration with Ryan as well as Sandra and Corey, we're postponing our feast until next Thursday. We bought a 16-pound turkey in La Paz – for \$50! We plan to do the works – mashers and gravy, sweet potatoes, the

Homecoming

A year ago, we felt very strange and anxious about the prospect of returning to the States for December. We thought we wouldn't fit anymore. We thought we'd cringe at all the consumerism and wealth, the great confusion between actual need and mere want. But we *loved* being back home last year. *Loved* seeing family and friends. Loved the pre-Christmas bustle, comfortable furniture and beds, familiar and widely diverse foods, worship service, speaking easily in English instead of haltingly in Spanish. We loved the warm, thoughtful, generous welcomes slathered on us. We loved being home.

So this year, we are brimming with happiness and anticipation. We can't wait to climb on that plane Dec. 6. We eagerly look forward to shedding some joyous tears as we fly into Miami watching the U.S. Customs video showing all sorts of Americans of various colors, sizes and ages repeating again and again, "Welcome to the United States of America." Makes me tear up just thinking about it. What a happy homecoming it will be!



With hearts full of happiness and gratitude for all of you in our lives, we wish you and yours a joyful Thanksgiving,

Deb and Jeff