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When I opened the WorldTeach email three weeks before my departure in June, I was nervous to find my site location in bold letters. I was going to be in La Loma, a small farming community in the northern highlands of Ecuador. I became more anxious because it was not only rural but there would be little communication with my family while I was there. After talking to the previous volunteer and finding out that she thoroughly enjoyed her experience, I started packing my bags. I reminded myself that this is the experience that I wanted, an opportunity to learn about simple living, to understand the rural farming culture, to appreciate the life my grandmother remembers fondly from her youth.

Everyday I woke up at 6 am to the sounds of roosters and chickens that filled the backyard. Breakfast was served at 6:30 am and the day began. My Ecuadorian mother took care of chickens and guinea pigs while also managing the only telephone in the community. My Ecuadorian father rode horses to the many plots of land spread out in the mountainous region to care for potato, yucca, tomato, and bean crops. My two siblings rode their bikes down the road to the nearest town of Cuellaje where they attended middle school.

In the one room, partitioned schoolhouse I found my students eager to learn English in La Loma. I was bombarded with constant questions about the translations of words and sentences from English to Spanish. They were obsessed with bilingual flash cards, Bingo to learn the numbers, and Twister to review weekly vocabulary. It took time to become a good teacher, especially for young children who had only had one previous English class the summer before. There were discipline issues that challenged me to find activities that engaged everyone in the classroom. Once a week I brought in a children's book to read to the class. I would read one page

and pass the book so that all students had a chance to read aloud. The first time I did this activity they stared in awe at the pages and kept commenting on how beautiful the illustrations were. We read that book three times that day. The kids loved the attention and the idea that they were the ones reading aloud.

However, there is not much time for story-telling in a two-room school where three grade levels are sectioned off into different areas of the room. Two teachers rotate throughout the ranging age groups, and most children work out of workbooks and teach themselves the lessons. By the time the children enter middle school, they are not properly prepared. My supervisor told me that she does not assign homework because she would fail them. When homework was assigned, no one turned it in because they have other responsibilities upon returning home. Many students walk close to an hour to school and an hour home, and once at home they are expected to help care for the farm or fulfill other household duties. It is not an easy life. From a young age a lot is expected of my students. In many ways academics take a back seat to working. Most students do not graduate from high school because of the necessity to work. Many teenagers marry and start families before their eighteenth birthday.

Living in La Loma has taught me that small communities can be havens tucked away from the pressures of large urban cities but they can also feel those same pressures in a concentrated way. La Loma experiences problems on a heightened scale because there are so few people and everyone knows each other. There is no sense of privacy. The rural nature of La Loma makes social problems difficult to solve. There are many stories of teen pregnancy, infidelity, alcoholism, and suicide. There are practically no resources in La Loma. There is no hospital, no school psychologist, and no cars. This community has the potential to be completely broken by these common social problems that afflict large populations of people in cities with

adequate resources.

My director told me that life in this community continues as it is because that is the only way to live. “We choose to live in peace or else we would always be in conflict”, commented my director one day. In other communities there would be tension, hateful gossip, and negative energy but in La Loma that is not the case. My Ecuadorian father said that he could not speak disparaging words of other people because he only wishes for others to find success in their lives and happiness with their families. While I was in La Loma, a young teenage mother tried to commit suicide by drinking a substantial amount of pesticides. Her husband was one of my father’s *peones*, employees. She received medical attention in Quito and visited a psychiatrist. The young mother was experiencing depression and unhappiness without an avenue to discuss her frustrations with life. My Ecuadorian family did everything in its power to support the recovery of the young mother and welcome her back into the community. There is a pronounced need for more psychological care and medical services. La Loma is a hardworking farming community that is not void of social problems. In certain instances, the manifestations of such problems are heightened because everyone is aware of personal struggles in a small community. It is even harder to diagnose physical and mental illness without medical presence in the community.

There is no industry in La Loma, and in neighboring communities there are few jobs. Never in my life have I been in an environment where higher education did not lead to a better standard of living but in La Loma that is the reality. If they are going to carry on the farming tradition, in their minds higher education is not a necessity. My students are intelligent, but they lack the resources and motivation to seek opportunities outside of farming. It is not because they lack intelligence but in many ways their poverty strips them of exposure to other ways of life.

The people of La Loma are kind-hearted and hardworking but they are isolated from the wider society and economic progression. One of the main reasons they want to learn English to a level of proficiency is to boost their endeavors in eco-tourism. La Loma is naturally beautiful and well preserved from environmental degradation. My Ecuadorian family was resourceful in every way possible, from making the bread for breakfast to building a door from scratch. In the United States, I buy everything I need out of necessity, but in La Loma they find everything they need in their surrounding environment. I want these two worlds to collide. Returning to the United States has behooved me to be more respectful of the environment I live in and produce less waste. At the same time, I want my students to reap the same benefits from being educated that I have and to initiate more economic development through higher education in their beautiful mountain community of La Loma.