

Hi,

I hope you're well and happy... At one point or another over this past month, you have been in my thoughts...

Continuing my reckless high-speed city bus adventures from central Quito to the outer fringes at the foot of the mountain ranges obscenely early every Mon-Thur morning, usually with my nose buried in a book and my feet buried in the dirt-encrusted floor, random pages of the city's urban culture unfold around me. Mostly oblivious, very often I don't even look up. In fact, one morning I was so engrossed in the pages of a great novel (*The Kite Runner*) that I forgot to look up intermittently and completely missed the stop at Carapungo. I didn't even notice until we were at least 10 minutes past the school. Oops! There was a nano-second freaked-out "Where The F#\*@ Am I?" moment, and then I got off the bus and caught the next one going the other direction back to school. I'm told a little burst of adrenaline first thing in the morning is good for health... I'm still not entirely convinced...

The hour-long trip home in the afternoon is fraught with a never ending stream of salesmen jumping on the bus at almost every stop and screeching an interminable sales pitch for whatever once in a lifetime bargain they have on offer for the day... It can be anything from chocolate bars & candy, cookies & cakes, CDs & DVDs, icecream & lollipops, hairbands & hairclips, and everything else imaginable that you never wanted... They are in the nefarious habit of dumping samples of their cheap and nasty wares into the hands of unsuspecting passengers and then almost bullying people to pay for whatever they are holding... Wise to this, I'm always holding a book, or hiding my hands and looking out the window... Then, added to this cacophony of vociferous, long-winded sales pitches, there are the musicians; some very good and some deserving of a quick gong and a goon with a long hook to pull them offstage immediately... There are also the beggars and the other assorted vagrants aromatically wafting past with their pungent "I Haven't Bathed In Two Years" scent permeating already malodorous rags which fraudulently pose as clothing and violently assaulting the olfactory senses of every passenger within four lanes of the freeway... Offended passengers actually pay these guys handsomely to get *off* the bus! Fortunately, not that many drivers let them on.

Meanwhile, in the relative safety of the streets outside the bus windows, it's possible to observe circus acts on every street corner; clowns, magicians, musicians, jugglers... a guy with a dancing couple strapped to his back, fire eaters, baton twirlers, acrobats, unicycle riders and much much more. If necessity is the mother of invention, then desperation is the mother of creation... There seems to be no limit to what people will do for money in Quito.

On my way home from a night out with some friends a few weeks ago, I was surprised by a man who leaped off the road onto the sidewalk in front of me, holding a large shard of broken glass. I didn't get a look at his face. I was totally focused on the hand holding the glass. "Give me all your money," he told me. I almost laughed at him. I didn't have any money. Anyone with half a brain knows that someone heading home from the bar district at 3am probably doesn't have much dosh left anyway! This guy was obviously not the brightest light on the street. "I don't have any money!" I told him. "Then give me your phone," he demanded. At this point, I had a decision to make. And I decided that this street-born scumbag was not going to take any of the things I always work so hard to have. In Spanish, I threw some

choice words at him about his questionable parentage and what he could do to his ignominious mother with his ridiculous shard of glass, turned on my heel and bolted down the street. I ran eight blocks before I stopped. He wasn't behind me... Since then, friends quite often walk me home late at night. It's a little irritating since I live on Colon (Google Earth coordinates: 0°12'10.06"S / 78°29'06.82"W), only five-minutes' walk from the bar/nightclub/restaurant district known as *La Mariscal*, and I seriously do not appreciate this criminal infringement of my independence...

Meanwhile, back at school, my Hokey-Pokey skills have been so finely tuned that I was recently asked to do a weekend demonstration for Parents' Day with 110 kids from Pre-School to Grade 4... In two separate appearances, surrounded by multiple circles of little kids, music blaring across the schoolyard, we put our stuff in, put it all out, put it back in and shook it all about... The parents loved it, amongst others apparently. Since that day, every single high school boy – whether I teach him or not – knows my name and frequently says hello... This week I've been doing "Simon Says" demonstrations in all my classes from Pre-School to Grade 7 for the benefit of parents who have been participating in classes all week. It's the end of school in a few weeks and the Directors are actively promoting the Summer English Program.

When I'm not on Shoelace Patrol (tying the laces of little boy's shoes so they don't break their necks tearing madly across the playground), I'm dealing with head injuries (usually caused by running too fast and slipping A-over-T on the unforgiving cement), and a first in my teaching career this week, I had a tooth-pulling episode... It was in Grade 7. I was teaching Gerunds... A kid says "Miss Roni, may I please go to the bathroom?" And I'm about to say "No. Wait five minutes," when he opens his mouth and wiggles an extremely loose tooth. "I need to go and pull this out," he tells me. "Oh! Go! Get out of here!" I say, suddenly feeling squeemish... Then, when he comes back, he proudly shows it to me all bloodied with bits of gum still hanging off it! Ewww!

One day not too long ago there was a freak storm in mid-morning. Normally unable to hear myself think in a classroom, this noise overrode the kids by countless decibels. Students were stunned into silence as we listened to roofs being ripped off all around us as howling wind, rain and hail pounded the school relentlessly for over an hour. It was pure pandemonium outside. We closed the doors and windows, trying to keep the rain and ice out, to little avail. Freezing water splattered in through leaks we didn't even know existed. Then suddenly, it all dried up and the sun came out. There was no real damage to the school and classes continued as normal. It wasn't until I was on my way home that I saw the trashed bitumen roads, flooded parks, cars strewn randomly on sidewalks, roofless buildings... and closer to the city, two feet of pure white snow lining either side of the road... It was Mother Nature on steroids... Or maybe she was raging on hormones...

On weekends, my flatmates and I often curl up on the sofa with pillows, blankets, chocolate and popcorn and watch the latest pirated DVDs. A couple of weeks ago we decided to watch *Marley and Me*. Using almost half a roll of toilet paper to mop up the mess after our sob-fest, our popcorn was sodden, and the chocolate tear-stained... I'd only recommend this brilliant movie to those who really need a good cry... For that, it's absolutely perfect! On a whim, and with extra time up our sleeves one afternoon, I decided to show it to one of my high school classes—in English with Spanish subtitles. In the school cinema they asked me why we needed a roll of toilet paper to watch a comedy... I gleefully replied, "Oh, you'll see later!" And then,

towards the end of the movie, proceeded to tear off sheets and hand them to girls sobbing into their friend's shoulders. The boys, stiff and uncomfortable with emotion, behaved like asses of course!

At home I've been making Turkish food fairly frequently... Menemen (Turkish omelette), Spinach with Eggs, Kizartma (Eggplant with peppers and tomatoes), Bezelye (Peas with tomato and garlic), and my all-time favorite, Hunkar Begendi... One night I made Ayran (traditional Turkish yogurt drink) and was instantly tele-transported back to Galip Dede Caddesi in the heart of Istanbul, with its endless row of music stores and loud intrusive traffic, the Galata Tower just around the corner, the kebab restaurants at the bottom of the street, just for a few moments... It was kind of freaky...

I've spent a few weeks pondering my next move.. I was thinking about going to Colombia... or maybe Venezuela... doing some more scuba diving, another diving course, more teaching... But I'd been suffering bouts of confusion about exactly what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go... Then, the Director at school asked if I could take on the Summer English Program and stay awhile longer. I accepted that job last Monday... It's become the "Summer English Program with Miss Roni"... So, I guess I'll be spending a bit more time in Ecuador... Even though I'm busting to get to the beach... Something I might actually be able to achieve next weekend...

My friend Rich from NYC is here this week (Yes, Jan, I'll send you a pic of us hanging out together very soon!). Actually, after spending a day with me in the city, he's been hanging out with all my friends in Galapagos for a few days and will be back in Quito tonight. He's bringing some fresh Galapagos fish with him... We'll be cooking tonight... then hitting the town... painting it red... until dawn... Should be fun! I'm looking forward to it...

Enjoy the photos of the mountain views from my apartment...

Take care of you...

big love, big hugs, big fish...

Roni

Photos below:-



[Cayambe Volcano](#)



[Cotacachi Volcano](#)



[Pichincha Volcano](#)



[View from the Dining Room Window](#)



[View from the Kitchen Window](#)