

las, on their way to the pretty Spanish Church on the Plaza to attend a Good Friday service. Dusk was falling so we reluctantly drove off, all of us wondering whether the roads would seem more frightening in the dark of night. Hardly a word was spoken on the trip back to Mucuchies. The night was dark and from time to time we could see the beam of car lights on the stone cliffs far below. When we arrived at the tiny village of Mucurbaú we parked the car in order to watch a religious procession. It was indeed a beautiful picture - the dark night, the tiny houses, dim shadows along the narrow street, with only a naked bulb at each corner to give any constant light. First came a young Andean rubbing a wooden stick along a piece of metal which made a grating and eerie noise. Then came the other men and boys of the pueblo carrying lighted candles in cupped hands. Then came a group bearing on their shoulders an effigy of the Virgin Mary called "La Dolorosa" or the sad one. The image was abundantly banked with local Easter lilies. Then came "El Entierro" or the casket containing an effigy of Christ and behind came the women of the village, wearing black mantillas, their beautiful dark eyes reflected by the lights of their guttering candles. Que linda!

We were indeed happy to get safely back to our brook trout dinner and asked our host to join us. Amongst other things he mentioned that the men of the village were great drinkers of a potent local brew called "Chicha" which is made from fermented maize. There is a special van to round up the many waywards every Saturday and Sunday night but our host said that it was because of boredom that these men drank so heavily. There were no movies in town and but two local cafes where the juke box had managed to penetrate. Apparently in the Andes Mexican music is "number one on the hit parade" rather than Venezuelan.

We arose early the next day to return via a different route over other Andean roads that took us through a more sparsely populated area where the mountains are very steep but more lush, often with a velvety sheen. For some strange reason most of the tiny huts we did pass seemed to be built right on the edge of the cliffs. They all seemed to have roofs of aluminum sheeting and these could be seen gleaming miles away, speckling the valleys. As we descended, the vegetation became more tropical and we again found ourselves in the banana belt where the houses were made of mud with

thatched roofs, thick rain forests flanked the road, and once again we saw the flowering orange Bucare trees and purple astromelia and could hear the sweet melodies of the tropical birds.

At lunch time we had once again reached the flat llanos and in Barinas stopped at the best, though rather dusty hotel for dinner. We had a typically criollo meal of roast pig, rice, yucca root, fried platanos (large bananas), lechosa (papaya melon), and coffee. We had asked for tomato juice to start off with and the waiter brought a tin of V-Ocho (V-8) juice to each of us. Each tin had two holes punched therein and each person was provided with an empty glass.

As we drove through the town after lunch, we noticed a quartet of llaneros dressed in liqui-liquis. Three of the men were young but the fourth was a wrinkled, bare-footed old man with a few teeth missing. He carried a large Irish-green harp looking a bit more primitive than the harps from the Emerald Isle, however. We stopped the car and asked the old man if he would play for us. This he did and we were quite honoured when he sang to us also. He was obviously serenading us girls and it was only later that one of the boys told us that the songs were quite naughty...untranslatable...and we girls had been cheering with gusto. While we were listening a crowd collected and a bus drove up. Apparently the bus passengers were concert-minded so the bus forgot its schedule and the passengers descended.

We travelled through the llanos for miles and then came to the Sabana country where the flat lands were speckled with date palms and pretty flowering trees. Guanare was our destination that day and it was rather nice to reach civilization again. This time we stayed at the "Gran Hotel de Coromoto" complete with swimming pool.

The following day we completed our travels along the Maracay, Los Teques route. In all we had travelled over 1000 miles in 3½ days, over flat lands, around mountain tops and through jungle forests and we two External girls were indeed happy that we had decided that foreign service was the life for us.

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