

5am

One of us gets up to turn on the coffee maker and five minutes later we sit up in bed sipping “the best coffee in Guatemala” (and that’s a direct, official quote). We light some candles (for effect, not because of a lack of electricity, though sometimes for that too!) and enjoy a quiet hour together. If no one in the neighborhood has a birthday, it is indeed the only quiet time around here. If there IS a birthday, the silence will be interrupted by firecrackers (sounding like machine gunfire) and loud happy birthday music broadcasted for half an hour.

6am

I put the ingredients for cinnamon rolls into the bread machine and hop on my iron horse to meet the faithful ones for a 20km ride up and down the “western highlands” or Altiplano, as they call this area of Guatemala. The sunlight show over the lake is always worth the effort and the conversations mostly enlightening. Meanwhile Michael wakes the girls with a cup of coffee (of course). He takes a brisk 20 minute walk to our property outside town (Mooibos), to meet with the builder, Hilario, a thermos filled with coffee in his backpack. Our house project is progressing well, with a room, a wall and one level excavated to show for the last eight months’ work. Currently they are drawing lines in the dirt for the foundations of that level, as well as a 3’ wide stone column which will help support the roof. For the second time the diggers found water and have to cap it, connect pipes, etc. What a blessing! Water from the rock!

8am

We meet back at the house. I roll out the dough for the cinnabuns and prepare other pastries. Michael turns on the espresso machine. There’s a knock on the door. Augustinus is here with the 100lb gas tank. He and Michael hauls it up to the third level where the tanks are stored. The kids are getting ready to do their chores and start their school-work. Another knock on the door. The work force shows up: Brennon, a friend who has been helping Michael these last weeks with the coffee shop remodeling/expansion and Da Vinci (actually his name is Dave), who is painting a magnificent mural on our outside wall, (which, by the way, was painted brown in July by some dear Texans who came down and volunteered for the job.) Also in July, Michael drove to Mexico to buy a bigger coffee roaster. At the same time, our neighbor who sold car parts, moved out of the corner shop. Our landlady offered the space to us. Since there is a door connecting it to the coffee shop, as well as a bathroom, we immediately moved in. We are using it for coffee roasting, coffee storage (all those burlap sacks are finally out of my kitchen and bedroom), coffee cupping and demonstrations. It needs a lot of work - changing the electricity, putting in a ground rod, building a counter and platforms for the coffee sacks, connecting the gas safely, installing fans and the smoke stack... The first half of this list is done. Now remains the last three items. And Brennon is a great encouragement, a skilled volunteer, and he’s willing to come before and after hours! All these changes resulted in the coffee shop seating six more people now. Oops, it’s nine o’clock. Time to brew Panajachel’s coffee. They are already waiting patiently on the curb! And Michael just jumped into the shower!

9.10am

Crossroads throws open wide its green door. Let the show begin! Very soon the walls are vibrating with the buzz of animated voices: Italian, Dutch, German, Japanese, Spanish, English, and Spanglish! Daily regulars mingle with the irregular tourists, making suggestions on itineraries, etc. Pacaya Volcano is spewing lava these days and a hike up its slopes, especially at nightfall, is a unique, awe-inspiring, yet safe adventure. We did it with several friends in November, lugging up picnic gear to enjoy pizza on the banks of the lava river! The phone rings. Coffee orders. Yes! Michael starts roasting the beans in the small roaster still sitting on the counter, while running around the bar periodically to serve drinks and cakes. I go upstairs to check on Kasia and Lungi in the school room. I find one reading in the hammock, guinea pig in her lap, and the other one walking on her hands - her long legs straight up in the air. Since they started gymnastic classes in October, that’s the vertical position I find Kasia in most of the time. I pull their ears, remind them of the Magna Carta conditions they signed at the beginning of the year, and grab my market bag on the way out. It’s another gorgeous blue-sky day.



11am

The phone rings again. It's the Cimballi dealer in Guate City. The espresso machine parts we ordered a year ago, finally arrived and he promises to deliver it this week! That calls for a celebration. While I take his shift behind the counter for a few minutes, Michael runs to his local fireworks distributor. He orders some rockets and noise makers and commissions Da Vinci to quickly design a poster to advertise a party on the beach Sunday night, "Fireworks and Coffee. Rejoice with us, for our parts have come!"

Noon

The church bells ring to announce the hour. Delicious coffee aroma fills Calle del Campanario as the little roaster that could, still does his part in this small enterprise. Two up-market hotels in a neighboring town started serving our coffee exclusively. Their weekly purchases provide a steady business. The most recent comment was that their guests now ask for second cups! We are hoping to gain more orders from local hotels this coming year. Dean shows up with his empty suitcase. He's leaving later today for the States and offered to take some coffee up with him. Our coffee fan circle up north are growing and we receive multiple email orders every Sunday when we go to the internet cafe to do our weekly "connecting". Sending it up with friends who mail it from there, has proved to be the most economic and sure way for Crossroads coffee to get to the US - despite its irregularity and casual arrangement.

1.30pm

He finally manages to get rid of the last lingering coffee drinkers so he could close for the "siesta" hour(s) and runs upstairs to join us for lunch. Black beans, rice, guacamole and chirmol (fresh tomato salsa) and tortillas are on the menu today. One of our favorites! We take coffee with us back to our room, and relax, feet up for an hour. That's the ideal anyway, but today, as with most other days, someone is knocking on the door: it's the milkman, Charles, bringing us 15 liters in plastic bags, all the way from Xela (70 miles away). We're glad he came today and that he has milk for us. Nothing is guaranteed in this country. Makes you truly grateful when things happen as you tremblingly hoped they would!

3pm

Rest time over. The last shift begins. It starts slow, as people overcome the lethargy induced by the mid-day sun. The girls and I study together for two hours. Kasia finishes 7th grade and Lungi 5th this December.

5pm

Things are hopping downstairs. It is a consistently busy time daily, especially a favorite time for coffee and cake with Guatemalans. Kasia goes to sign up on the time sheet and falls in behind the counter. They take turns every afternoon, earning a little money and learning the ropes. It is naturally a big help for their dad too. Meanwhile, Lungi is planning her sidewalk sale for Saturday with a friend. She labels her old clothes and knickknacks, all items priced between Q1 and Q5 (less than a US dollar). They make a colorful "Vende" sign and dream of their next shopping trip to buy more knickknacks, to be sold in a few months (against a loss!) A while later I find her intently measuring and weighing her turtle, Flash. She has a stethoscope around her neck, listening for his heartbeat. She keeps a monthly record of the data in a notebook dedicated to Flash.

6pm

The shop is still full of happy people. The dirty dishes are piling up into a mountain. The two of them sweat to keep the lattes and espressos coming. Just then the phone rings again. Right now it's a novice roaster across the lake double checking on the timing for French Roast. Tomorrow it can be someone looking for someone else's phone number. The coffee pot is suddenly empty and four "cafe con leche" orders just arrived. As he goes to fill the pitcher with bottled water from a five gallon container, he realizes it's empty. On the steps we store enough of these and they are replenished twice a week. He squeezes through the crowd and maneuvers back with the oversized water bottle on his shoulder. Just when they feel they can't possibly be more in the weeds than this, a worn-out-looking traveler leans on the counter and says, "Someone on the bus told me you will be able to inform me where to find a furnished apartment for a month? He directed me to the Crossroads and assured me I will find what I'm looking for here." Should we change our phone number to 411?



7pm

Closing time. The crew start cleaning up while the corner table is still occupied with a young couple oblivious of the world, whispering by the light of the flickering candle. Another colorful character swings by, dressed in the typical woven pants and skirt. He has only one tooth and doesn't speak clearly, only motions with his hand. His name is Jaos and he also comes for his daily cup of jo. Usually he pours out the last sip on the floor and gives a big grin. Then he waltzes off. A few admirers hang out by the counter, watching Michael meticulously wiping the machine and pastry domes. The empty cake containers arrive in the kitchen, and I figure for the next morning's baking. After the door slams shut, each one grabs a bite and we all start winding down. Some nights I go for a short walk down the busy main street with Michael. Tonight we settle for an episode of Corner Gas, huddling together on our bed. We read for a while and by 9.30 we're turning the lights out, sinking deep very rapidly.

