

We are in the last throws of the rainy season here in Guatemala. There are wildflowers on the hills and the mornings are crispy clear over Lake Atitlan. Our town has been more noisy than usual, because of all the political parties vying for attention. There will be a presidential election on November 9. All the major parties have trucks driving around towns, with catchy ditties being broadcasted over loudspeakers. Sometimes you hear three different ones together - small town, narrow streets. Our kids have their favorite ones and sing along enthusiastically. We look forward to (relative) peace and quiet again soon.

It was because of annual NOISE in Panajachel that we left for a week early in October. The town celebrates its patron saint - San Francisco - for a couple weeks every year. Since we live close to the Catholic Church, the center of the festivities, we never get any rest with loud fireworks (bombs/rockets) going off and electric marimba music all through the night. So, it has

become our annual vacation indicator! This year we went to Lanquin, in Alta Verapaz, a department northeast of where we live. The trip took about seven hours, mostly on well paved roads. The last few hours were rather tense as we slipped and slid on a muddy dirt road. We are always amazed to see where and how long our Toyota goes! It reminds us of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang! We enjoyed three relaxing days on the bank of a river. It was a lovely place, quiet and comfortable. The girls had a big field to explore and we had enough time and energy to swing in the hammocks! We brought our coffee maker and gas stove along, as well as a small fridge (which we usually have plugged into the van). So, we were all set for meals and snacks. We went for a few walks and tubed down the river with the kids. Great adventures! One night we walked to some caves nearby and watched hundreds of bats flying out of the entrance. Another day we took a 40 minute pickup ride to another famous spot, Semuc Champey. It is a spectacular place. The brown, rushing river Cahabon tumbles underground and flows for about 200 yards before re-emerging. Right on top of the underground part, another clear mountain stream feeds several limestone pools, which flows into each other with beautiful small waterfalls. We had a picnic lunch there and swam around in the pools for a few hours. Lungi spent most of the time trying to catch tadpoles. We are really grateful for the getaway and the privilege to have seen another beautiful part of this country. On the way back we stopped in Guatemala City and spent the weekend with some friends. Michael had his two upper wisdom teeth pulled in the City. Our dentist friend Mike Kadera did a fine job and wouldn't accept any payment, but settled for the promise of some Mochas here in Pana next time they come visit. We found our town fully recovered from the festival when we arrived back on the 13th of October. Sigh.

We have been in the process of applying for our two year visas (preliminary residence visas). It took several trips into Guate City and a good dose of the (anticipated) bureaucratic run arounds, but we finally have the stamps in our passports, valid till October 2005. It is a tremendous relief and we are grateful to God and all our "friends in high places".

Work on our property has progressed steadily. We are encouraged to see the projects getting done one by one. The driveway up the hill is almost done. It took a lot of digging and retaining. We are using river rock for the walls and it looks great!

The doors of the coffee shop is still open Tuesday to Saturday. Michael roasts coffee at least three times a week, and sometimes, like right now, late into the night because the power was off most of the day and he has an order to get ready for tomorrow. It is often busy as a hive downstairs. Upstairs in the kitchen there is quite a lot of activity as well, even though there is only one person running around! Recently, I accidentally put boric acid instead of baking soda in the carrot cake! What a providence that I realized it before the cake was frosted and sent down. It had to be trashed of course, and all done over again. Bummer. (I have the boric acid someplace else now, and clearly marked...). Next level up is the schoolroom, squeezed in between spare parts, stacks of drying wood and the laundry machine. The three of us really enjoyed studying plants and geography this year. We learnt so many fascinating facts together, and I am happy to see the kids remember them and increase their observation skills throughout. It is very satisfying to see them think critically more and more. Our discussions are often very entertaining.

Time to close this screen. We all send our love and hugs your way! Until next time!

