

ADVENTURES IN MIDDLE EARTH

September 2022

We were in the United States on home ministry assignment during the months of May and June. On June 13, indigenous and other discontented groups instituted a national strike that paralyzed Ecuador for 18 days (such strikes are not uncommon, but this was the longest one in history). Demands included a reduction and freeze of fuel prices, better healthcare, improved educational opportunities, a ban on mining and oil drilling in indigenous territories, among others. There were marches, violence, and property damage (\$2 million in Quito).

Quito is particularly vulnerable to road blockages because it is in a high Andean valley with only four main access roads. After a couple of weeks, the city began to run low on food and other essentials.

The strike had personal consequence for our missionary coworkers in the small community of Shell. Here is an excerpt from their newsletter:



"It is day 9 of a National Strike as I am writing this letter. What that means for us is that road blocks placed by demonstrators prevent any movement in or out of Shell except by air. Currently, we are seeing shortages of propane gas tanks for cooking/ hot water in homes, drinking water, and gasoline. Our kids are back to virtual classes. The four mile bike ride to school past demonstrators in full face masks wielding clubs and spears made the return to online classes a happy option."

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A few days before our return to Ecuador, mediation by the Catholic church resulted in a 90 day moratorium and Quito appeared almost normal upon our return. Everyone is praying that negotiations with the government are successful and that there isn't a new strike at the end of September.

Scott continues in his role as interim executive director of Voz y Manos Ecuador. It isn't uncommon for him to come home and say "I didn't do any accounting today." He is learning new skills and enjoys the challenge, but he will be relieved (double meaning intended) when a new executive director is found.

An unexpected consequence of being the executive director is that he is traveling to Cuba for 10 days in October to represent Voz y Manos at the 25th anniversary of Apoyo Cuba, a partner ministry providing training for pastors and other church leaders.



Before agreeing to go, he asked Jody if she wanted to go to Cuba. It took her about five seconds to say "yes." We fly to Havana and take a public mini-bus the length of the country (500 miles and 14-18 hours!) to Santiago de Cuba for the celebration. We aren't doing that for fun — the only practical way for us to get to Cuba is via Panama City to "La Habana." And getting back to Ecuador means reversing our path.

On a personal note, Scott hopes to have cataract surgery later this month.

May grace and peace be with you all.

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