

Amigos de Casa Marianella



www.casamarianella.org

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From Argentina to Casa Marianella: A Mother and Daughter's Journey

By Julien Ross and Daniella Brandazza

Maria Isabelle and Camilla woke up in Buenos Aires, Argentina on the 4th of July 2001, with two plane tickets to Miami, 300 dollars, and great dreams of finding a better life in the United States. Three months later, after a Mexican immigrant woman in Miami recommended they go to a place called Casa Marianella in Austin, Texas, Maria Isabelle and Camilla are on their way to establishing a pleasant life in the United States. "We left Argentina because there are no jobs, and the education is very poor for Camilla," says the 33 year-old Maria Isabelle on a calm Casa Marianella Sunday, as 7 year-old Camilla plays in the background with the resident chickens. "It has been difficult because Camilla is very close to her grandmother who is back in Argentina, but we had no other choice."



Maria Isabelle and Camilla

house. At the age of 17, Maria Isabelle moved by herself to Buenos Aires to find work as a street vendor. "Buenos Aires was a huge change," Maria Isabelle recalls in her rich Argentine Spanish. "It was so crowded and dangerous compared to the inland provinces. It was difficult living there alone at 17."

Maria Isabelle eventually met a young man, Herman, with whom she lived in Buenos Aires and they had Camilla. Five years ago, Herman died from a rare cerebral parasite. "He was a good man," Maria Isabelle says with teary eyes, "he loved Camilla and took very good care of her."

In Buenos Aires, Maria Isabelle and Camilla were fortunate to live next to an elderly couple who had no children. They embraced Camilla and Maria Isabelle as daughter and granddaughter. During this time Maria Isabelle also discovered a personal talent and passion for drawing and wood crafting. She had received some used drawing materials from a friend and began tracing cartoon characters and different alphabet fonts. Maria Isabelle purchased a wood-saw machine and through a self-taught process, developed her designs into handmade wooden crafts. Maria Isabelle had a workshop and went door to door selling her hand-carved signs and name plaques.

Continued on page 2 (Mother and Daughter)

Christmas Gift Idea! Maria Isabella can make a wooden name plate or address sign for you! Call Casa 385-5571 for information!

E-MAIL FROM AMOS

While working at Casa Marianella in 1999, Amos wrote about his experiences sleeping on the street in Austin. For the past year, Amos has been traveling in South America.

I had \$9000 when I started my travels. I spent \$300 on vaccinations and roughly \$1000 on health insurance, and \$3200 on 2 months of language school. When I was in Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador I spent roughly \$7 per day when I wasn't traveling.

The last 6 months of my trip in the Andes cost almost nothing. In those countries you can budget \$10 per day if you are traveling every 3 or 4 days and not going out much at night. Even the plane ticket home was cheap at \$370.

If you eat the local grub, food for one day costs about as much as the hotel room. Then tack on a couple extra dollars per day for museums and other sight seeing. I traveled cheaper than other people, but I also traveled much longer. I figure that I traveled for the last 9 months of my trip on \$3,500. I am not sure if most people would want to travel that cheaply, but it is certainly livable on that budget. In Ecuador they rent basic rooms for \$30 per month. In La Paz, Bolivia a room costs 100 Bolivians (\$15.40) per month.

I am seriously thinking of applying for grad school, temp working for a while, and then going to travel in Central America and the Caribbean for 6 months. I will never have another opportunity to travel like this again in my life.

I want to know and understand the places I will be studying. Talking to people, sampling their food and stepping into their culture aides that process. Knowing a string of facts about their history does not bring understanding in the way that traveling there does. Of course really living there brings an even greater level of understanding.

In Bolivia, I caught a longer glimpse because I dated a school teacher for 2 months. I regret that I didn't stay in any one place and work or volunteer for a while. You really need to live and work in a place to start catching all the subtle angles. Oh well, you can't do everything in life.



Amos

Mother and Daughter (continued from page 1)

"My dream is to have my own workshop and business here in the United States, where I can sell my crafts," says Maria Isabelle with determination.

Maria Isabelle has already made progress toward her dream. While searching for jobs in Austin restaurants and hotels, Maria Isabelle also purchased a used wood-saw machine and started crafting her unique name plaques in her free time at Casa Marianella. She carved one name plaque for each of the Casa Marianella staff to hang in the office, and also crafted several other pieces she hopes to sell around Austin. "All I need is a small loan to start my business," adds Maria Isabelle, "but I don't know if that is a possibility here for someone like me."

After a long, difficult journey, things are looking up for Maria Isabelle and Camilla. Maria Isabelle has found some temporary work in Austin and believes she is close to landing a stable job that will allow her and Camilla to move into an apartment or house. Camilla enrolled in first grade at Austin's Allen Elementary School and is meeting lots of new friends, learning English, and especially enjoys afternoon recess.

"Casa Marianella has been everything for us," says Maria Isabelle. "We arrived with nothing, and now we have many options. There are no places like Casa Marianella in Argentina or other cities, where you are treated with respect regardless of where you are from or what language you speak."

A CASA MARIANELLA ROMANCE

In February of 2001 Domingo Torres and Olivia Trejo met at Casa Marianella during their stay as residents. Friendship turned into romance and on July 14, 2001 they got married! They are doing well and visit Casa regularly.



ROLANDO'S STORY

**A Casa Marianella
Resident Profile
by Dan Thompson**

It may surprise people to learn that some of our residents come to us after they have already successfully integrated into work and housing in the U.S. Rolando's life here in America was radically altered one day in August when he was hit in broad daylight by a truck. He was thought dead at first: then hospitalized with severe internal injuries. Rolando suffered a closed head injury, lacerated liver, broken hip, broken femur, and a broken knee. He still has trouble using his right hand and arm due to nerve damage. He had been working in Austin, as a welder, earning seventy dollars for a long day's work- seven times what he might earn in his home country, Guatemala!

These horrible facts make Rolando seem like a victim, but Rolando is no statistic. He is a force of nature whose story we wish to tell as he can now recall it. When Rolando came to Casa in August after he left the hospital, he was using a walker. He couldn't remember his injury or understand where he was. After two months of therapy and steady persistence, Rolando walks without crutches although with some difficulty, knows where he is, and can use his right hand and arm in a limited way. Yet, we had to dissuade him from taking midnight work in a tortilla factory for fear of a fall or other accident. He is driven to work because he is the sole support for his large family in Guatemala. He had been sending money to his family regularly until his accident. Rolando had interrupted his own studies to be a teacher in order to undertake the long journey north in search of work so that his brother and four sisters might finish their own studies. His parents have passed on, his father when he was his younger and his mother just this year. He has two children and his wife Rebecca to care for as well.

Rolando's main wish now is that he might continue to support his siblings so they can continue their studies. Rolando needs time to heal: he still needs to gain strength and balance before he can resume a regular work schedule. In the meantime, he helps at Casa by doing small jobs.

Every time I ask Rolando how he is doing he says he better, although I can still see blood coming from his nose at times. "Good, thanks be to God" he says, and I am reminded as I drive slowly through Austin's crowded city streets that there truly, but for the Grace of God, go I and you and all of us, Americans y amigos todos!

Rolando would not ask, but contributions for his family would be welcome!



Rolando at Casa Marianella

CASA MARIANELLA WISH LIST

Men's Clothing

**Work pants and jeans
(waist sizes 28 - 36)**

Socks

**Tennis shoes/
work boots**

(Sizes 7 - 10)

Sweatshirts/jackets

Bedding

Twin sheets

Pillows

Blankets

Toiletries

Bath towels

Toothpaste

New toothbrushes

Shampoo

Razors

Cold medicines

Food

Fresh fruit

Milk

Eggs

ESL Class

Lined loose leaf paper

Pencils

Spanish/English dictionaries



From left to right
Jennifer Long, Dan Thompson, Patricia McCabe, Maggie Cochran, Julien Ross, Karen Lyons, Stan Main, and Marisa Martineau,

MEET OUR NEW STAFF

by Jennifer Long

Casa Marianella is happy to welcome a new staff of seven people for the coming year.

Marisa Martineau comes to us from New York City after graduating from Fordham University in the spring of 2001. Marisa has traveled in Mexico and the Dominican Republic, and in college she worked with Asociacion Tepeyac, a group that serves the needs of Latin American immigrants in New York City.

Dan Thompson comes to us from the Peace Corps in Africa. He brings with him an understanding of what it means to live in a mud hut with no electricity. He taught woodless building in the region where he lived in Mali. Dan can communicate well in both Spanish and French.

Julien Ross is a student at the LBJ School who works with us part time. Julien spent the past summer working in Managua for the U.S. State Department. He has a special interest in documenting immigrant stories.

Karen Lyons has returned to Casa as a part time volunteer and coordinator of our English classes. She also teaches Adult Basic Education Classes at The Austin Academy.

Maggie Cochran is staying on for her second year at Casa as an Assistant Director. Maggie is our volunteer coordinator.

Patti McCabe is now in her third year at Casa. Patti has cultivated Casa's chicken population in the backyard. If you have not visited for a while, come see the chickens!

As usual, we have an incredible group working here. Please call on us if we can help you in any way.

A Little Faith by Dan Thompson

I came to Casa Marianella from New Mexico where I was doing a Peace Corps teaching fellowship on the Navajo Nation in New Mexico. Previously, I was a forester with the Peace Corps in Africa. The hardest part of my service—even harder than the heat, the bugs, the mud hut, even harder than the diseases, has been "bringing the world back home."

I learned so much from the African subsistence farmers with whom I lived two years: certainly more than I taught them. And, I had no idea how to share this with my own family back "home" in the United States, let alone with a class full of poor Navajo students.

This is why I feel Texas is so lucky to have Mexicans, Central Americans, Caribbean Islanders, and Andean Mountain dwellers, from as far away as Argentina, willing to come and share their wisdom with us. What a shame we aren't always listening! Here at Casa Marianella, we sometimes get so preoccupied over towels and sheets that we hardly have time to talk to these amazing people who have come from so far. What lessons they have for us! I think of the courage of the man who came here to work and support his family and five siblings in Guatemala who are all studying. To help his brothers, he left his studies to be a teacher. Now, the tables are turned and they have to leave school and work to help their brother. Slowly following his freak accident, Rolando is impatiently learning to work again.

I think of the unbelievable courage of another: a woman who just lost her baby but carries on here unable even to find a moment's solitude in which to grieve but healing herself slowly as she knows how. All these people live right here in this house, under our very roof and many more have stories to tell if only we had more time to listen...

I often hear the devout Catholics of Latin America or the holy Muslims of Africa called lazy because of their religion or that they are fatalists and so they are poor. Despite the vast history of proud empires in both these regions that this superficial opinion ignores, the simple truth is that these people have enormous faith **despite** being poor. And they can only be called lazy by those who have never worked the earth themselves, work without which none of us could eat! Can a faith that leads people to cross deserts, rivers and mortally perilous highways be a "fatalistic" faith? Can a faith that sustains people through famine, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, be called

(Continued on page 5)

A Word from the Board President

Casa Marianella Gets Technology Grant

By Stan Main



Stan Main

In last year's Fall/Winter newsletter Casa Marianella announced that we had a brand new website, www.casamarianella.org. We've gotten a lot of great feedback and compliments on this new website and hope to soon have a copy of the site in Spanish.

We'd like to thank Onramp Access, Inc. for their generosity in designing the site for us and donating the server space to host www.casamarianella.org. If you are needing connection to the Internet at your home or business or help with web design, we recommend Onramp Access, 322-9200.

Thanks to help from the City of Austin, Casa Marianella is continuing to help our residents keep up with technological ad-

vances. In July, Casa Marianella received a technology grant through The City of Austin. With money from this grant, we were able to purchase cable Internet service for a computer that had recently been donated. This computer was then set up in our living room and is now available for resident and community use! We have had several volunteers who donate their time to teach residents how to use the Internet. We have also been able to use the grant to buy English as a Second Language teaching materials to use on the same community computer. If you can spare some time to help teach some informal computer and Internet classes to our predominantly Spanish speaking residents, please give Casa Marianella a call at 385-5571!

Thanks again to the City of Austin and Scott McClain for his help applying for the grant, and Onramp Access for their continued support of Casa Marianella.



CHRISTMAS GIFT-GIVING FOR CASA MARIANELLA

If you, your family, your church or your office would like to make this Christmas special for the residents of Casa, the following gifts would mean a lot !

- ? inexpensive men's watches
- ? phone cards
- ? backpacks

We would love to give one of each of these to every person at Casa! We average of 20 to 25 residents.

Casa Marianella English Teachers: Thanks for Your Support

Weeknights from 7:30 until 9:00 are not prime-time TV.-watching times for residents of Casa Marianella. During this time our residents are working hard at Allan Elementary School learning English skills to help them in their everyday lives here in the United States. Our English program would not be such a great success without the hard work and dedication of the following outstanding English teachers:

¡Gracias!

Emily Carpenter
Carmel Drewes
Kevin Jewell

Angelica Becerra
Kevin McCabe
Paul Frank
Valarie Brown
Stan Main
John Morthland
Adrian Howkins
Sarah Lasswell
Rudy Sandoval
Tim Gaertner
Amy Youngkin
Eric Radjef
Meredith Greenhouse
Julia Maffei
Jennifer Shultz
Sherry Tuell

(FAITH, Continued from page 4)

"fatalist?" Can these creative cultures be called "lazy?" Couldn't we all use a little such faith in these times of terror? I for one could. So I'm taking a few moments more to listen to our residents each day and the wisdom they bring. I invite you to join. In Africa we said:

*A bird builds its nest every day.
Poco a poco se anda mucho...
Little by little we go far!*

Board Of Directors

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Patricia McCabe
Maggie Cochran
Marisa Martineau
Dan Thompson
Karen Lyons
Julien Ross

Peace Corps Volunteers and Casa have a Picnic

Many thanks to the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who organized a Refugee Picnic in Pease Park for us with wholesome food and much festivity. Fun was had by all!

AITF for Central America

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