

# **The View from Here**

by

Rick Scheideman (Primavera, 2010)

To the northeast, the eye caught a glint like a star as the sun rose above a distant summit, the Sierra Nevada. I leaned against the concrete retaining wall of the balcony. A classroom door was unlocked behind me. In ten minutes, 15 high schoolers would ascend the stairs, open and slam the door numerous times, and then I would turn toward English. On that early spring morning, gazing at the sunlight emerging from a mountain, a transformation began its measured pace. In light is hope.

Kimberly and I desired adventure. We got it. Our journey began with conversations on Skype with friend Kim O'Hagan, and an introduction to his wife Sylvia. Our "yes" to an invitation meant paperwork, excitement, and fear, and more paperwork. Then came the touchdown in Barranquilla, a subsequent a jolt of heat and humidity, lines of worn travelers at Immigration Control, baggage inspection, and a language we knew about and knew nothing.

Santa Marta drew me the first day. Through the switchback pass from Rodadero to downtown Santa Marta, I marked the vista. From my youthful tramping the Colorado mountains, I felt the value of height distance. Santa Marta blankets from the harbor toward the Sierras on the floor of a coastal valley that branches northeast toward Parque Tayrona and southwest back to the beaches of Rodadero.

That was my first view. Then there were days, weeks, littered with bumpy emotions, tears leaked. Slightly and slowly I gained balance in an unsteady world and leaned against the willing care of a community called Bureche.

After more than two years, I still mark that vista each time. Daily I rediscover the privilege of being part of Santa Marta. I live in a city whose name I hadn't known until three years ago. This name has marked my life indelibly.

Yes, there are mosquitoes and wasps in a variety of shapes and sizes. Motos, taxis, and trucks behave like mosquitoes. One is never sure about the mental state of one's taxi driver. If there are baby booties hanging from the rear view mirror, chances favor relative tranquility. If not, well then you take your chances. Now and then a taxi accelerates and swerves at the whim of a want-to-be NASCAR driver—best to look out the side window and whisper for your planned destination.

When the breezes fade, the heat warms as a topic for conversation, or the rain created rivers in Guira—weather, of course, the world-wide topic.

Samarios' value what all people desire: care for their children; love and friendship; the telling of a joke and a bask in the laughter; to feel the warmth of an arm

around the shoulder, to belong. The differences between all of us are only in the expressions of those desires in cultural practice. Examples: I try to figure out at the check-stand how much money I owe (initially I avoided this by giving the clerk more pesos than I figured the cost—my figuring often erred on the side of not enough); or, smiling clueless at the portero who explains directions to the ferreteria: or stuttering symptoms in irreparable Spanish to a sympathetic doctor equally challenged by English.

The beauty of Santa Marta resides only partially in her Sierra Nevada, the village of Taganga, or stretches of white and blue along Parque Tayrona's coast. Mostly, the beauty of Santa Marta is her people. The resplendence that is Santa Marta occurs in an unexpected smile in the elevator, the patient explanation of directions from here to there, a handshake—all and all it is the willingness of your people, Santa Marta, to open your hearts to a blundering stranger who butchers your gracious language and offends your sensibilities in unthoughtful ways.

The family away from my family is Bureche, a grace of love—and those eager, unforgettable faces that laugh, and yell, and weep, and wonder, and stumble, and now and then say, “Ah hah!”

My, oh my, how we have all grown.