

Travel Story, Buenos Aires – 2013

September, 9-10, 2013

A bit over a year ago, we flew down to Buenos Aires, Argentina, for short tour of the city and I gave a couple of papers at the University of Buenos Aires. This trip was essentially the same except that I gave a long presentation at the Universidad Nacional de Lomas de Zamora, at the conference on "Quality of Life in Latin America." The first time, the University was downtown but this time the University was an hour's drive into the northern suburbs.

Both times we only stayed 4 days but in addition to working, we got out to take a self-planned tour of the City and to enjoy a little walking. Both times, it rained much of the time and was too cold to stay out long, even with moderately warm jackets. Last year, the University was cold because the meeting rooms (classrooms) had no heat, but the cold was nothing like the cold this time. Yesterday, they took me by taxi and bus to the university in pouring rain and a temperature of about 40 F. Everyone at the school and the conferences wore some kind of jacket and many wore scarfs because they had no heat. I had a warm jacket and it was OK for about an hour. Then it rained harder and the driving wind took the chill down to about freezing. After I gave my talk in the afternoon, I began to shiver for longer and longer periods. In addition, I was having trouble balancing when I got up and I got a mild pain in my chest. We ended our meeting about 4, but we had to wait another 90 minutes for the bus, as they run on Mexico time in Argentina. I was told it was their "informal" way of doing things, by a woman from Jamaica. At least the bus was partially heated, but the taxi we took afterwards had no heater and the driver kept the windows rolled down to keep the windows from fogging. It took me a good 2 hours to warm up, meanwhile I looked up the symptoms of hypothermia on the Mayo Clinic website, and I clearly had a mild to moderate case of hypothermia. Nancy said, "Never again do we come here in the winter." The experience taught me how health-threatening homelessness in cold temperatures can be. Not only is it a matter of pain and suffering, but it is matter of life-threatening illness as well. It gave me a new perspective on the seriousness of suffering. It also gave me renewed

respect for the students and others who have to live through cold winters in countries that cannot afford heat in schools and public places.

The trip as a whole was a success. We got rested up, read lots of books, and had fun walking around our hotel in Puerto Madero, the new district built on an old industrial harbor. They keep several huge (100 foot tall) cranes as outdoor museum pieces. Some even have wooden cabins for the operators. You can see these antique cranes in the photos of the city skylines, both at night and during the day. Nearby were 2 museum sailing ships and the new Bridge of the woman. The Bridge is unique in that not only does it turn 90 degrees to let ships pass through, but the architect shaped it to resemble the figure of a woman while tango dancing, a distinct passion of Buenos Arians.

The San Telmo Sunday Antique Market turned out to be the most fun of our sightseeing. Every Sunday dozens of antique vendors squeeze into a tiny square and a couple of alleys to sell old bottles and small antiques. It attracts so many locals and tourists that musicians set up stages. One opera singer was accompanied by an array of instrumentalists. A classical guitarist had blaring loud speakers and a handful of tango dancers in full costume. I cannot remember hearing so much classical music on a street. It goes with the European culture brought in by Spanish colonizers and many European immigrants of the last Century. While the culture is more European than American, the newspapers write about the United States more than Europe. The Argentinian economy is so dependent upon the financial policies of the United States. What our Reserve Bank does and what our State Department wants greatly influences Argentina's economics and thus, their politics. Understandably, they like many in other South American countries have mixed feelings about this dependency. The news is made more appealing by a 60-year old, attractive woman as President.

Buenos Aires is known as the Tango capital of the world. Dozens of theatres and night clubs have nightly tango shows and dance contests. But what

was surprising was seeing couples making tango moves without music at the Sunday morning market. Just like one can occasionally see loving couples around the world hand in hand or even public kissing, in Buenos Aires they express their romantic feelings for each other by doing tango moves, for or with their partner. As children learn to tango at an early age, it is understandable that it emerges effortlessly without the intention to show off or get attention. That, I guess, is the way dance should be, not limited to a dance floor in front of a music stage.

Another highlight of our wanderings was the discovery of the 'Gyms Y Vida,' these are tiny little urban parks, and each filled with exercise stations. None of the machines required electricity and all the moving parts were simple and maintenance-free despite the rain. One machine worked like bicycle pedals; another was basically identical to an expensive elliptical fitness machine, and my favorite, a slalom ski simulator, exercising the muscles of your midriff that allow for one's lower body to sway from side to side. It was the best slalom machine that I have ever tried out. The pictures capture Nancy and me trying out different fitness stations. We took the photos on a weekday morning with the park to ourselves. In the evenings and weekends, these fitness parks were busy with children and adults in equal numbers. The machines were designed and manufactured in Argentina by a company called Fox Exercise Equipment. In web searches, I could not find anything like them in any other place in the world, although some parks in the USA have one or two similar machines. Every school and neighborhood should have one of these fun parks.

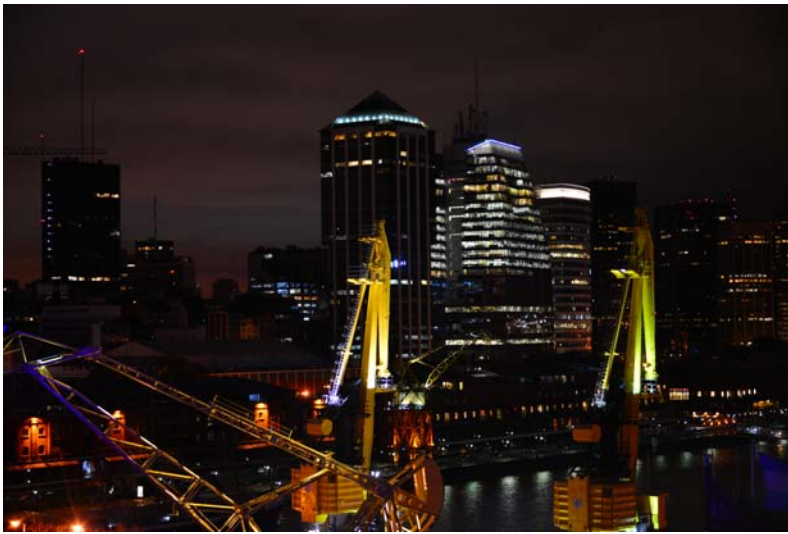
A must-see public area is the historic Plaza de Mayo with the Pink Palace at one end and the Cathedral at the other. Also, at the Cathedral end is the start of the road stretching directly to the Congressional Building. At one end of the Pink Palace is the balcony where Evita made her historic plea to the public, "Don't cry for me Argentina," which became an astoundingly popular Broadway musical and Hollywood movie. At our visit this time, it was raining but still a few wet souls wandered about the plaza. Instead, we went inside the mammoth and beautiful Catholic Cathedral to take pictures and keep dry. Nearby was a Russian church with beautiful blue domes, but it was not open to the public.

Our sightseeing tour strategy, which we have refined over time, is to study the guide book and select the places that we would most like to see. Then we arrange with the hotel for a car and driver to take us to these places. This time it cost \$90 for three hours and the driver spoke English pretty well. It was about the same cost as going on a bus tour but much more pleasant and we have more control over our time.

One of the sites we chose to visit has been called the world's most elegant bookstore. It occupies the building of what was once an expensive, posh opera house and theatre. It is called Ateneo Grand Splendid and very much worth visiting on a regular basis if you read Spanish. It is an immense building with three large balconies as well as the main floor and stage filled with books. The photos below give one a small sense of what it is like to be there browsing books in the bright lights.

We were there three nights and five days because all flights between southern South America and North America are overnight flights. On our last day of the trip, we relaxed while getting ready for the return. Both of us slept only 3-5 hours on the plane, but with naps the next day we were almost back to normal. Despite the hypothermia, I have a good feeling about the trip. After I spoke, a professor-priest gave a talk about meaning and problems from lack of purpose among contemporary youth. He mentioned my comments favorably three times. After he talked, India's Ambassador to Argentina spoke and gave support to my ideas a couple times. Basically, I made two conclusions: one was that we have an ethical obligation to compassionately relieve suffering and the other was that Latin Americans rate themselves as happier than any other world region because of their family and community cohesion in which kids grow up caring for their family members and friends, giving them purpose and meaning. I guess you can see there is still a little bit of missionary left in me.

1 View of City from Puerto Madera



2 daytime view of city from Puerto Madero



3 Bridge of the Women and Puerto Madera



3-story graffiti near antique market



Ateneo Grand Splendid Bookstore



Ateneo Grand Splendid Balconies



Catholic Cathedral on Mayo Squary



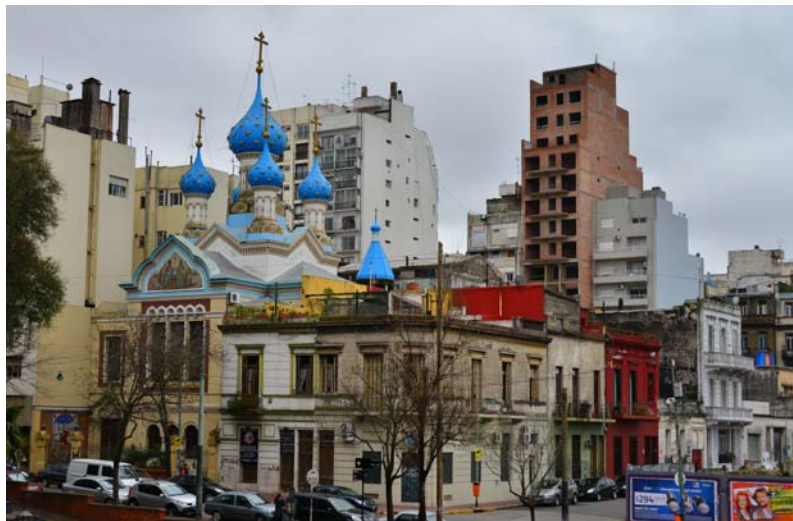
Cycling Nancy



Winding Machine



First Russian Orthodox church in BA



men in Sunday antique market



Ron enjoying the slalom ski machine



Ron in rain under the Tipa trees - native to AR



Swinging Nancy and Bridge of the Woman



Tango in the spontaneous streets



Tango in the streets unself-conscious



Tipa trees native to Argentina



Typical bright colored house of La Boca

