

Dear Everyone

Greetings from swampy San Francisco. With humidity through the roof, and temperatures stubbornly in the high 30's, we are expecting Shrek to turn up any moment. However, the main uninvited guest so far this season is dengue. This is San Francisco's first full-blown dengue epidemic. Cases have been increasing over the past few summers, coinciding with rising temperatures, but the last three years have also been characterized by drought, reducing the breeding opportunities for mosquitos. This summer however has been particularly wet, leading to local flooding, and pools of standing water for mosquitos to breed in, hence dengue has hit unprecedented levels in the city and the scramble to buy repellent has been reminiscent of the toilet-roll saga in covid.



Dengue aside, the year is charting a normal course so far. We finished up the long vacation with our Scout summer camp, to Cerro Colorado, traditionally home to the indigenous people *Comechingones*. This group no longer exists in any cohesive sense, but there are descendants still living in the village, some of whom work to preserve the group's heritage through research and education, particularly through guided tours of the prolific cave paintings, one way in which the tribe communicated their news and passed on their histories.

We made the most of the area (photos), with visits to the museums, a hike up the all-important *Cerro Colorado* (Red Hill, so named for the colour of the soil), activities in the surrounding woods and river, a woodcarving workshop session led by a local craftsman, and a service project to restore some of the rotten wooden benches and tables belonging to the campsite.

Following camp, we had the traditional couple of days' scramble to gather paper-work, uniforms and equipment in preparation for the start of the new academic year on the 26th of February. As is also traditional, the start of term is marked by a stimulating level of chaos. Three weeks in, we don't yet have an established time-table, and every evening we are sent Whatsapp messages informing parents of what times the different year and class groups will start and finish the next day. The students only find out what subjects they have when they arrive at school each morning, and even this sometimes changes during the course of the day. Added to which, there are teachers' strikes being held on ever-changing dates, since agreements on pay and conditions have not yet been finalised in our current challenging political and economic climate.



We have been working to restore our house to order following the break-ins and misuse of same while we were away. This process has been more time-consuming, physically demanding and emotionally arduous than we were expecting, but we are mostly sorted, bar a few details, and enjoying our home again. Last week Hazel attended a neighbourhood meeting to talk about the rise in house-breaking. There were over a hundred people present, each with their own stories, and a panel from the police and local council talking about different measures being put into place. This also helped us to understand the broader context, that while our house was particularly vulnerable in our absence, the general reality is of increased insecurity, possibly related to the government's new austerity measures.

Our other activities are starting up again in line with the academic year. The riding school began term-time schedules on the 1st of March, slightly modified owing to the high temperatures and sporadic flooding. Church activities are up and running, house groups will restart at the end of the month. Hazel preached last Sunday, on the raising of Lazarus, as part of our preparation leading up to Easter. Martin is up this Sunday, he is currently preparing his sermon.

Thank you for all your prayers and support. We hope you have a good month.

Hazel X Martin



Joni & Daniel

