

Notes of a Mad Girl #6 - Bill in Peru

In 1983 I went to Ecuador with Cathy, a fellow artist from graduate school in Madison, Wisconsin. It was my third year of teaching at Rice University in Houston, Texas and I had saved up enough money by being a Resident Associate or “dorm mom” to take a real trip. We were going to go to Egypt but since we really couldn't afford such a trip we decided to visit Quito where Cathy's brother was working for the A.I.D. program.

Cathy wanted to make a side trip to the Galapagos and I wanted to fulfill a dream of mine to see Machu Picchu. Without any talent for Spanish I was determined to go alone if necessary. Cathy's Spanish was perfect and she agreed to see Peru with me. We had a grand time sitting at the top of those pointy Machu Picchu mountains. While shopping in Cuzco I spotted a fat little plaster guy with arms outstretched tied to the walls of one of the many shop stalls along the street. He measured about fourteen inches tall and had a funny felt fedora on his head, which also sat on top of another wool hat. He was literally covered with small objects for good luck and had a fur coat over his brightly painted body. They refused to sell their good luck doll until I pulled out the equivalent of about twelve dollars. They kept his fur coat. The now happy sellers said that the doll was to smoke every January. The exact date has been lost from my mind but as long as I hit any day during that month I strongly believe good luck is mine for the year. (It's also the only time I ever light up a cigarette and Bill has never failed to smoke the thing down to the filter.)

When Cathy and I arrived at the Quito airport we were informed that our airline was on strike. I looked at my new black-eyed, rosy cheeked buddy and said “hey Bill, help us out here”. Within 60 seconds our names were spoken over the public address system to come to the counter and pick up our boarding passes. We also had to change planes in Guayaquil, Ecuador. We were stunned upon arriving in the second airport that it too was on strike, Cathy this time asked Bill herself for some help. In two minutes our names were called out for boarding our second plane. By the time we landed in Quito Cathy was

convinced that Bill was our new best friend and quite the jolly guardian angel.

A package from Cathy arrived in Houston for Bill a few months later. It was filled with nice little objects to hang on his chubby little body as a thank you for helping us.

Bill gets to smoke a cigarette every year and if there's a fire in my home, he'd be the first object to be carried out the door.