

Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational Experience No. 48



**WHAT ARE WE
CALLED TO BE?**

This motivating experience is about Lorena and Feli, about these two characters, with their children Sara and Juan, and revolves around the challenge we all know in our lives, in the search for the answer to the question: what are we called to be? After a very brief interlude in conventional life, Lorena and Felipe opted for more than gratifying bets: to build an associative experience in full horizontality, circumscribed to alpine landscapes in tune with dignified craftsmanship and the option of permacultural family life, embraced by the forest.

A GRATIFYING BET

Visiting Abrazo del Bosque, the family farm of Lorena Pérez and Felipe Segovia with their children Sara and Juan, located on the slopes of the Tzanzaragagán volcano (Cushni Rumi), next to the Piganta Protected Forest and very close to the Mojanda lagoons in the upper part of the Guayllabamba River Valley, in the parish of Atahualpa (Ha-

baspamba), two and a half hours by car from Quito / Ecuador, one can perceive the fullness of life and the balance that the living family transmits. Inquiring the reasons for this palpable bet, Felipe explains a little of the path of his life. "After finishing university, I spent six months as an agronomist, selling agrochemicals, to realize that this could not be the path of my life". Together with Lorena, who participated in the first PDC (Permacultural

Design Certificate Course) in Ecuador, and has been involved in trekking and mountaineering, working as a naturalist guide, they accepted the invitation of Father Julio Gortaire, SJ, an uncle of Felipe, to live with indigenous communities in the Andean region of Guamote. The couple agrees in their reading that this phase of their life has been decisive in answering the question of who they are called to be.





ALPACA LANDSCAPES

"The life of the women of the community of Culebrillas in the province of Bolívar has changed since they have been spinning alpaca fiber; this is what they live on", shares Lorena with a look of tenderness and satisfaction

on her face. Alpacas (South American animal with a long neck and long hair that looks like a llama) originally inhabited, along with guinea pigs and dogs, the inter-Andean valleys. With the violent arrival of the Spaniards, who brought sheep and cattle, the camelids, including alpacas, were confined to the highlands, where they finally suffered their

exodus, replaced by cattle, sheep and horses. Felipe, who during his stay in Guamote was involved in the development of management plans for indigenous Andean territories, rescued ancestral forms of harmonious use of the Andes. Together with Lorena they became interested in the "paqochas" and "llamingos", as alpacas and llamas are tenderly called in the Ecuadorian Andes.

Within the framework of territorial sustainability plans, according to FAO in 2005, some 5,000 alpacas were quantified in Ecuador. In 2013, the Ministry of Agriculture of Ecuador imported 200 alpacas from Ayaviri, Peru, to form genetic nuclei in the regions of Cañar, Chimborazo and Cotopaxi. *"It has been a huge challenge to rejoin this animal", recalls Felipe, "since the challenge was to involve the peasant communities and rescue the art of spinning alpaca fiber". Lorena adds another challenge: "It was necessary to unite alpaca breeding with handicrafts, valuing the fiber more for its use".*

The alpaca has plantar pads that allow it to tread very softly without damaging the paramo (high moor) soil, thus preventing erosion, and it also forages without depredating the vegetation layer and continuously produces nitrogen-rich fertilizer with its feces. But these qualities focused the interest of many people on the value of these animals in terms of landscaping, management and sustainability of the territory; the potential of the alpaca to benefit and sustain the peasant families of these Andean regions was not yet evident. Lorena sums it up: *"It had to be achieved that the communities of the place benefit; and this before the loss of our alpaca culture since the sheep has been introduced by the colony and to rediscover after 5 centuries the coexistence and the usufruct with the alpaca is quite a challenge"*.

PAQOCHA

Looking back in time, Paqocha has been a rewarding and transformative feat; we will listen to Lorena's reflection on this: *"We started with a utopia"*, she

recalls with an accomplice smile; *"each woman has her own style and her own art of spinning. At the beginning it was not so easy, to reawaken the interest in spinning fiber and weaving by hand. But in Paqocha we did it together"*. In Peru, with more than four million alpacas, the current trends are worrying: natural fiber is losing ground to acrylic yarn and hand weaving is threatened by mechanized looms. These are alerts that Paqocha has taken into account in the process of rebirth of the alpaca culture. Lorena continues: *"Finally, we were able to form a network of more than one hundred indigenous-peasant women who were encouraged to spin fiber and weave. Of course, it has been a somewhat laborious process. We identified a standard for fiber classification in Peru (NTP 231:300), which was transferred to Ecuador as INEN 2852"*, recalls Felipe and Lorena adds: *"Paqocha allowed us to realize this utopia, which we continue to share with the women and their families around the paqochas and the rescued handicrafts"*.

Lorena and Felipe continue to energize

ze this network in terms of the alpaca fiber value chain in Ecuador. They have organized courses on alpaca and moorland management, natural dyeing, felting and weaving during these 18 years. Encouraging results have been achieved at the alpaca community level, beautiful natural colors with eucalyptus, walnut and cochineal. *"Paqocha, born in 2005, is like an identity art gallery, where the focus is not profit"*, explains Lorena. A scarf, of first quality fiber and yarn, spun and woven by hand, achieves thanks to Paqocha, a sale price of forty dollars instead of eight dollars, which was the price of a scarf of lower quality fiber, yarn and design years ago.

The members of Paqocha feel empowered and were able to avoid its denaturalization: Paqocha continues to be a valid bet and is a reciprocal space of cooperation and shared benefits. The pandemic, instead of slowing down, helped to organize and energize everything in Paqocha, especially the dynamic logistics

between alpaca producers, spinners and weavers. There are more than a hundred women and their families who, thanks to Paqocha, find their livelihood, ranging from alpaca breeding in the high moorlands, fiber processing, spinning and even hand weaving. Throughout the entire chain, the association has maintained its autonomy, avoiding intermediation by third parties.



EL ABRAZO DEL BOSQUE

In search of the essential, in a simpler life, in 2018 Lorena and Felipe came with their children Sara and Juan to the parish of Atahualpa and decided to buy a 10 hectares plot of land to realize their life project which is their family farm baptized as "El Abrazo del Bosque" (The Embrace of the Forest). Part of the surface of the farm borders the last patches of native forest of the Piganta Protective Forest of more than 1,000 hectares. The family intervenes in 3 hectares of their property and seeks a regeneration of the original vegetation in the areas of their property that connect with the wildlife corridor. Felipe explains a bit about the permacultural philosophy of the farm. *"Life is born in the soil. The first few years you need to invest a lot of time, work and even investments as in our case for drainage. But once you have managed to establish an edible forest and diversified orchards, animal husbandry, the biggest effort later on is maintenance. You can live your old age with quality and tranquility on the farm"*.



Felipe, in addition to the farm, continues to consult on sustainability plans; Lorena is dedicated to the farm, with its many facets. Sara is thirteen years old and takes care of the chickens and Juan takes care of the ducks and other small animals. Rubén, a neighbor, helps out part-time on the farm. Almost permanently they also count on the help of volunteers from abroad; they are often young couples who come for a month or six weeks, working part time,

receiving room and board. Lorena and Sara coordinate the volunteers. *"It is an enormous help that the volunteers give us, which means an economic saving of 80 dollars a day to the farm's pocket"*, explains Lorena.

REGENERATIVE RESONANCE

El Abrazo del Bosque produces variety rather than quantity, including forest honey and trout, Greek yogurt, eggs and milk, jam and lettuce, seasonal fruit, cheese, among others. The cookies are made by Sara and Juan. With the neighbors, after a first phase of observing the newcomers, Lore and Feli managed to get in touch with the people. A workshop on dreams and soils started a group of 12 families that has become the Habaspamba Association of Agroecological Producers (ASOPAH). Doña Rosa is very grateful to the group because she was inspired by agroecology. *"The group has become my family"*. Danilo and Lili returned after many years of working in Spain and had in mind to



dedicate themselves to floriculture with a full chemical cocktail. Thanks to the group, today they are agroecology radicals. Several of the neighboring farms, following the example of Abrazo del Bosque, have diversified, reducing the number of head of cattle, and have started hor-

ticulture. The products are sold at the local village market and, by invitation, at fairs and ecological stores in Quito.

The Parish Council as local government showed interest in supporting the regenerative approach of the group's family farms. It also supported the creation of the Mojanda-Cambugán conservation and sustainable use area, abbreviated ACUS, which covers 27,000 hectares and seeks the protection and regeneration of the primary cloud forest. Feli and Lore actively participate in the territorial technical roundtable and in the management committee of the Mojanda-Cambugán ACUS.

The regenerative resonance at the local threshold of Abrazo del Bosque is palpable. Ruben, who is a permanent collaborator on the farm, often hunted birds to prepare soup for his son. It occurred to Lore to propose a deal to Ruben: on soup day, Ruben would take a trout from the farm pond and save a few birds. And with a photo that Felipe took of a frog to place in an online publication of

Abrazo del Bosque, it was discovered that it is the glass frog (*Centrolene buckleyi*), which had not been sighted in 39 years in Ecuador and has returned, living in Abrazo del Bosque.



MESSAGES TO THE FUTURE

More than ever, the likelihood that the future will have a future again depends on the answer of each of us to the question of what we are called to be. Given the current ongoing trend of the Anthropocene, this dilemma could not be timelier.

Doing economy, based on elements of horizontality, reciprocity, human-nature harmony, sustainability and dignity shows us the need for a complete re-engineering of the economic DNA...because without this, everything that generates something of a future with a future, will be branded again and again by the guild of conventional economy with *"this is not economy"*.

Life testimonies such as those given to us by Lorena and Felipe, can be a source of inspiration and faithful proof that another world is possible as long as we begin, each one from our own lives, to build this promising reality from the small and from everyday life. Synergy and empathy will help to enlarge this yeast for the transformation of the civilization model.

Almanac of the Future

The text was elaborated, based on conversations at the Abrazo del Bosque farm, located in the parish of Atahualpa in the Upper Guayllabamba River Valley, by Jorge Krekeler (coordinator of the Almanac of the Future - facilitator of Misereor on behalf of Agiamondo), accompanied by Javier Carrera, social coordinator of the Seed Guardian Network, together with Gael, his son. A big thank you to Lorena Perez and Felipe Segovia with Sara and Juan for the kind welcome and the time they dedicated to the curiosity of the visit of the Almanac of the Future.

Authors: **Jorge Krekeler**
jorge.krekeler@posteo.de

Design: **Ida Peñaranda - Gabriela Avendaño** Photographs: **Felipe Segovia and Lorena Pérez - Jorge Krekeler**
Translation: **Ida Peñaranda - Olaf Niemtschik**

Contact information regarding the documented experience:

Felipe Segovia and Lorena Pérez
Paqocha - Abrazo del Bosque Farm
www.paqochaecuador.com
<https://www.facebook.com/PAQOCHA/>
Facebook + Twitter: **paqocha**
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/paqochaecuador>

Edition: **August 2023**

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