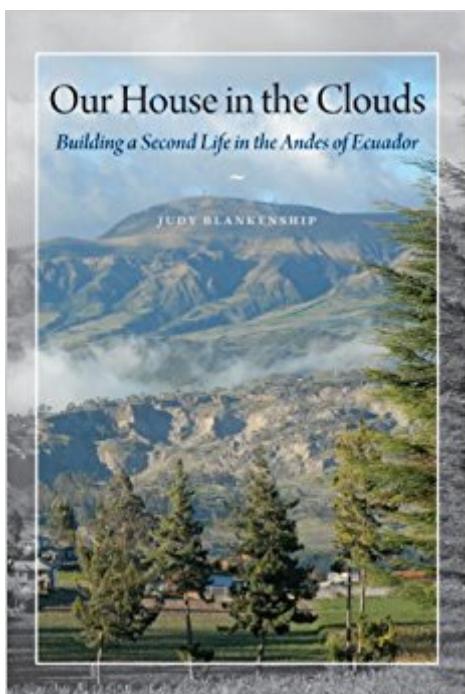


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Our House In The Clouds: Building A Second Life In The Andes Of Ecuador (Louann Atkins Temple Women & Culture)



Synopsis

While many baby boomers are downsizing to a simpler retirement lifestyle, photographer and writer Judy Blankenship and her husband Michael Jenkins took a more challenging leap in deciding to build a house on the side of a mountain in southern Ecuador. They now live half the year in Cañar, an indigenous community they came to know in the early nineties when Blankenship taught photography there. They are the only extranjeros (outsiders) in this homely, chilly town at 10,100 feet, where every afternoon a spectacular mass of clouds rolls up from the river valley below and envelopes the town. In this absorbing memoir, Blankenship tells the interwoven stories of building their house in the clouds and strengthening their ties to the community. Although she and Michael had spent considerable time in Cañar before deciding to move there, they still had much to learn about local customs as they navigated the process of building a house with traditional materials using a local architect and craftspeople. Likewise, fulfilling their obligations as neighbors in a community based on reciprocity presented its own challenges and rewards. Blankenship writes vividly of the rituals of births, baptisms, marriages, festival days, and deaths that counterpoint her and Michael's solitary pursuits of reading, writing, listening to opera, playing chess, and cooking. Their story will appeal to anyone contemplating a second life, as well as those seeking a deeper understanding of daily life in the developing world.

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Customer Reviews

After several lengthy visits to Ecuador, including two Fulbright grants, the author and her husband

chose in 2005 to build a home in a town of 10,000 located two hours north of Ecuador's third largest city, Cuenca. This thorough book reveals the indigenous Cañari culture from its ancient history up through the impact of Ecuador's 1999 economic collapse. Then, whole towns of men migrated to "the yonny," slang for New York. These men wire home money that rejuvenates the economy, with Quichua-speaking plot-farmers counting wads of bills as they step away from Western Union. This same money buys "migrant houses," the gaudy-colored, concrete-block homes that dot the mountainsides. Blankenship and her husband want a traditional adobe-walled, tiled-roof casa, and they create a small masterpiece. They live there six months a year, and the rest in Portland, Oregon. Blankenship is committed to Cañari. Yet, when she is glad they buy more land to protect their privacy and view, and when she laments a pending housing project, it's hard not to find this book a bit exclusive. --Dane Carr

"This is a compelling memoir about creating a life in another culture. . . . Blankenship offers fascinating perspectives on the indigenous Andean world from her stance as a writer, a photographer, and, as the book progresses, an honorary local. . . . The book will definitely appeal to general audiences eager to learn about contemporary Ecuador, and it will draw readers curious about the day-to-day reality of creating a life in such a different environment. People who want to escape the confines of a single cultural viewpoint will also find inspiration here. We come away with a sense of the profound differences and inequalities in the world, but also of the many ways that friendships transcend our divides." (Joanne B. Mulcahy, author of *Remedios: The Healing Life of Eva Castellanoz, and Birth and Rebirth on an Alaskan Island: The Life of an Alutiiq Healer*)

I am a former Peace Corps volunteer who lived and worked in Cañari, Ecuador for two years in the late sixties. It is not surprising to me that Judy Blankenship and her husband Michael found it a magical place to build a home. They did not enter into the project as arrogant outsiders. Having spent much time already learning the ways of the Ecuadorean culture in general and the Cañari indigenous culture in particular over many visits extended over a dozen years, their advanced cross-cultural skills allowed them to work with local people to create their dream home in the clouds. Part anthropologist, memoirist, photographer, and adventurer, Ms. Blankenship opens up a world previously little known by foreigners, and shows how establishing good, even loving, relations with a native people is the essence of being a good neighbor, and the key to building a warm home.

As a retiree in Cuenca, Ecuador, I loved reading about the joys and challenges of Judy and Michael.

I related to few circumstances and chuckled when I thought, "I know that feeling." I share the joy of living in Ecuador where I can enjoy a healthy lifestyle. I look forward to spending some time in Canar. Viva Ecuador.

If you like to read about adventuresome living, and if you appreciate learning about other cultures, then you should enjoy this book. I "met" (electronically) Judy Blankenship several years ago after reading her first book, "Cañar: A year in the highlands of Ecuador" (also recommended). This new book does not focus entirely on the Cañari (an ancient indigenous people of the Southern Andes) as her first one did. Rather, it alternates between telling the "adventure" of building a 2nd home far from many creature comforts, while still sharing more of what life is like in a small Andean town. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

What an interesting look at life in a fascinating culture! What beauty at such a high altitude! It seems like you are stepping inside Judy's home and daily experiences in Canar.

As we're considering retiring to Ecuador, the book gives some good insight into some of the issues a couple might encounter.

We enjoy traveling very much, and one of our main joys in traveling is to meet people in different parts of the world who have quite different lives from us. Third World countries and peoples are especially interesting to us, though it's often difficult to get accurate insights into their lives. When we plan to visit other countries, we read books for several months in advance, to learn some history and culture, so we can absorb better when we're actually there. This is an excellent book to read if you're interested in Ecuador, or indigenous peoples of the Andean highlands. It makes the Canari culture come alive, through the eyes of Americans who build a life there. It's also a very interesting story of building a life (and a house) in a foreign culture. It gives deeper insights into the Canari people and culture than any visit of a few weeks could do. I really enjoyed reading this book.

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