

The Dance of the Condor & the Eagle

By John Curl

Around 1980 I was doing some work for an Oakland homeowner when she offered me a box of old National Geographics. On top of the stack was a cover photo of a beautiful Kuna Indian woman with a gold ring in her nose. I opened to an article tracing Christopher Columbus' voyages in the Caribbean. On the page was a photo of a hawk with a small bell tied to its foot. The caption read, "His greed awakened, Columbus demanded of each adult an annual tribute: enough gold dust to fill four hawkbells. Pay or perish. Many Indians fled, but the Spaniards tracked them down with dogs. Thousands ended their lives with poison. In 1492 an estimated 300,000 Indians lived on Hispaniola. By 1496 a third of them were dead. Less than a decade later the first black slaves arrived to take over the Indians' oppressive burdens."

This was my first contact with the truth about Columbus. The article said little more about this nasty history and concentrated on his travels. I later found this to be a pattern in the voluminous Columbus literature: the genocide of the Caribbean Indians was relegated to footnote status in the heroic saga of a great explorer.

I realized that it was almost 500 years since 1492 and, given people's penchant for celebrating the anniversary of almost anything, this was going to be a big one.

So when I heard about the *Encuentro* I knew I had to go to Ecuador.

Early in May 1990 I met with Nilo Cayuqueo, a soft-spoken man with a small mustache and gentle eyes, a Mapuche Indian from Argentina, director of the South and Meso-American Indian Information Center (SAIIC), on East Fourteenth Street in Oakland. SAIIC was organizing the Encuentro in the U.S., together with Indian organizations in Ecuador and Columbia. The First Continental Meeting of Indigenous Peoples on the 500 Years of Indian Resistance was scheduled for July 17 to 21 in Quito. Indian Representatives from the Arctic Circle to the tip of South America were expected to attend. An Indian meeting of this scope and magnitude had never before been attempted; it could mark a watershed for the American indigenous peoples. The Encuentro (or Conference) was called to examine the results of five centuries of colonial occupation, to coordinate activities around the upcoming 500th anniversary, and to plan political strategies for the future. Many governments of the world, including our own, were sponsoring costly year-long 1992 "quincentennial" celebrations, and the Encuentro was intended to counter this. From the Indian peoples' point of view Columbus' voyage was not a "Discovery," but the vanguard of an invasion.

I'd already been working on the 1992 project with the local chapter of the Alliance for Cultural Democracy (ACD), a national multi-ethnic arts organization. Nilo asked me about ACD's ideas for organizing a Bay Area-wide open cultural festival for 1992. I explained that it was still in the earliest planning stage; we realized that although non-Indian artists could play an important part by putting forth their visions, we realized that Indian people would have the leading role in quincentennial projects. We expected this lead would come from the Encuentro.

I also told Nilo my idea of trying to get the City of Berkeley involved in the 1992 commemoration. San Francisco was already involved, in a conservative way. Replicas of Columbus' three caravels were sailing from Spain, scheduled to touch fifty ports, and ultimately dock in San Francisco on October 12, 1992, in conjunction with a huge Italian celebration. Given Berkeley's history of support for progressive causes, maybe it could be a counter-weight.

Nilo said, "Let's invite the mayor of Berkeley to come to the Encuentro."

"It's not too likely," I replied.

"Then if she can't make it, let's ask her to send a representative."

Several weeks later I was on my way to the airport, as Mayor Loni Hancock's representative to the First Continental Encuentro.

I vaguely knew that Ecuador is on the northwest shoulder of South America, below Columbia and above Peru, on the equator. A quick look at a map told me the Andes cut like a saw blade through its heart, separating the Pacific coastal plain from the Amazon basin. According to my tour book the Galapagos Islands, 1,000 kilometers out to sea, with their unique wildlife, are the country's main tourist attraction. Ecuador has one of the most ethnically Indian populations on the continent with about 40% of its nine million people traditional indigenous, another 40% mixed, about 10% white, and another 10% split between black and Asian. Ten different Indian languages are spoken, the most widespread being Quichua, the Ecuadorian version of the lingua franca of the Andes under the Incas.

The Incas had been dominating the Ecuadorean highlands for less than 100 years when the Spaniards arrived. Before that, indigenous civilizations known as Quitus and Caras flourished in the north, Puruhás and Cañarí in the south. Around the year 1450, the army of Tupac Yupanqui, the tenth Inca of Tawantisyuyu (or Peru) marched north from Cuzco into Ecuador. Quito fell to the Incas in 1472.

According to my travel book, while periodic civil wars were a constant in much of the Andes, Ecuador remained comparatively stable in recent times, at least by Latin American standards.

But the day before my departure I listened to the news on La Grande Diez-Diez, a local Spanish radio station, and much to my surprise they said a nationwide general strike was scheduled in Ecuador the very day of my flight.

The English language news made no mention of the strike. All day I listened carefully to the Spanish news. Yes, there was a general strike in progress, called by the Ecuadorian labor federation known as FUT. Businesses, factories, public offices, schools, utilities and transportation were shut down to varying degrees around the country, with some cities entirely paralyzed. But the strike was scheduled for only one day, as a show of force, a protest against the government's economic policies. All was expected back to normal tomorrow, the night I would arrive.

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From the plane window the lights of Quito sparkle crisply in the dark mountain air. At 9,350 feet above sea level I can taste the thin atmosphere, and tire quickly carrying my bags. The only traces of the strike are slogans painted on numerous walls. As to its significance, the taxi driver shrugs. "We have one or two general strikes in Ecuador every year. The Levantamiento last month, the Indian Uprising, now that was something unusual, something which never happened before in my lifetime."

"The what?" I ask.

"Didn't they report it in North America?"

"I must have missed it."

"But nothing will come of it. Nothing ever does."

At the hotel I discover I am one of the first participants to arrive. It is four days early.

I pick up a local paper. On the front page is an article about CONAIE, the Ecuadorian Indian Confederation sponsoring the conference. But the Encuentro is not mentioned. The article talks about negotiations with the government that have broken down, the main points of contention being a certain Agrarian Reform Law and the creation of a fund that would permit Indian communities to buy land.

The next day I go to the CONAIE building. The lobby is bustling with activity. On the floor several people are painting a huge canvas. In the center is the sun and the crescent moon joined together, circled by a rainbow. On one side is the face of an Indian man, a condor emerging from his forehead; on the other side is the face of an Indian woman, an eagle emerging from hers. The wing tips of the two great birds meet in a circle. The painter looks up at me. "Do you like it?"

"It's very powerful. What does it mean?"

"This is the symbol of the Encuentro. It's based on a old story."

Later I find out the story, a legend of the Andes.

Many thousands of years ago the Eagle of the North and the Condor of the South joined their tears to form Central America, concentrating their wisdom on that small piece of earth. Indian nations developed there, oriented to the laws of Nature. Those nations passed through great trials, and were eventually split and dispersed into the four directions. Prophets instructed the elders to maintain the traditions during the dispersal, and to search for their paths to liberation. Each five centuries the life of the nations would be nourished and renewed. For our time period, the beginning of liberation would be symbolized by this prophesy: "When Condor of the South and the Eagle of the North come together again, the union of their tears will heal the wounds of the Indian peoples and fortify their spirit, body and thought. A new generation will spring forth who will reach out their hands to end oppression, exploitation and injustice, and will write the word liberty in the sky."

I introduce myself at the office. A young woman named Monica rummages through a file, pulls out the copy of the Berkley mayor's statement that I had sent down, and asks

me to write a translation. I fumble with the task for a while, then notice a stack of new books on the table, "The Indigenous Uprising in the Ecuadorian Press", published by CONAIE. I pick one up. Most of it is recent press clippings. I slowly piece together the events of the previous weeks.

Beginning on June 4, the Indians of Ecuador seized land that had traditionally belonged to their communities. In Indian tradition, individuals do not own land; the community owns the land and assigns it to individuals to use. But since the Spanish conquest, great haciendas have claimed almost all the land, while most Indians are landless. In 1965 a progressive military junta decreed the Agrarian Reform Law. Any land left fallow for two years could be bought by a landless person to farm, in order to put all farmable land to use. A new constitution guaranteed "to the producer the right to hold land." But the hacendados found ways to stall out the Agrarian Reform Law, and for 25 years it was scarcely implemented. So on June 4, 1990, the Indians went into motion. They moved onto parts of forty haciendas left fallow for two years. They demanded that the government resolve 70 long-standing land disputes and pay 90% of the cost of the lands. They blocked major roads all over Ecuador with rocks and logs. They held huge marches and rallies, with a half million people in the streets. They seized churches in Quito and Guayaquil. They demanded that the government stop foreign oil companies from destroying the Amazon, and order them out of the country. The Uprising was timed as a protest against upcoming local elections, in which everyone is required to vote but which are rigged and never change anything. Casualties of the Levantamiento: many injured, one dead.

Afterwards I go off alone to the Quito zoo. It is almost empty, perhaps because of the late hour, perhaps because of its strange location inside a military academy: the cadets are the keepers. I sit in front of an outdoor cage and watch four huge condors perched on a rocky crag, dark gray bodies with white necks and wings, bald purplish heads, the male with a comb on top; one spreads its huge wings, swoops down to the ground, picks up a piece of flesh, then flies back again. I find four small feathers on the grass nearby.

Back at the hotel desk is a note to me from two SAIIC people, Bobsy Draper and Peter Veilleux, to come down to see them in another room.

The tiny room is filled with boxes; literature being prepared for the Encuentro is spread out on the cramped beds. But for no apparent reason (all the conference-reserved rooms are the same price), the hotel has given me a large two room suite. The Encuentro office moves into my livingroom, and I soon have several roommates.

I quickly make other friends: Rupert Robinson, leader of a Maroon colony on Jamaica; Irvin Auguiste, from a Carib settlement on the island of Dominica. Yolanda and Elena, translators; Agnes, who has a Sonoma County radio show, her teenaged daughter Sunshine; June Le Grande, storyteller, KKUP Cupertino; Alfredo Quarto, who organizes a political caravan. Two other Alliance for Cultural Democracy people arrive, Joe Lambert of Life on the Water Theater at Fort Mason, and Larry Rinder of the U.C. Berkeley Art Museum.

But Nilo hasn't arrived. Finally word comes that he's been detained by the police in Argentina, where he'd stopped off on his way here. We'll have to proceed without him.

People are pouring into Quito from all over the hemisphere. The vast variety of faces is truly amazing, over 400 people from 120 different Indian nations, tribes and organizations.

One of my roommates is Ed Burnstick, a tall Canadian Cree. I think it strange that there are separate hotels for the North American and the Latin American delegates, although it does simplify the language problem. Ed says it also reflects past difficulties. He is a veteran of many international Indian conferences, and has seen communication breakdowns between Latin and North American Indians. He explains that the historical experiences of Indians in the Latin and Anglo colonial worlds were different in some ways, creating problems of cultural understanding.

While North American Indian history is filled with hundreds of broken treaties by England and later the U.S., Spain never made any treaties and never recognized any sovereign Indian nations. The Spaniards conquered and enslaved, while the Anglos wanted only the land and moved the Indians off by any means necessary.

The Latin Indian people seem much more organized than the North Americans, or at least more represented by large organizations. According to Ed, there is no equivalent in the U.S. or Canada of the Ecuadorian national confederation CONAIE or the Columbian ONIC. Ed says that many North American Indians are quite frustrated with organizations; many consider their own tribal governments to be fabrications by the dominant society, and not representative of traditional ways.

At the last minute Nilo arrives, and his compañera Wara. They had been harassed by authorities in Argentina, but finally managed to get to Peru and cross by land into Ecuador.

But almost simultaneously word comes that a delegate from Columbia has been arrested at the border for carrying a few coca leaves, traditional among his people. Unknown men identifying themselves as CONAIE have appeared at the other hotel and taken the names and passport numbers of all the Latin delegates. At the airport arriving North American Indians have been photographed. Security measures have to be taken.

Tomorrow morning is registration then a press conference. Frantic preparations of the packets continue most of the night. I overhear Agnes say that she went to the zoo to get a condor feather, but the guard told her it was closed and didn't let her pass. I give her one of mine.

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Down at the CONAIE office the press conference begins. The international media is there in force, the notable exception being the U.S. press. I am asked to read the Berkeley mayor's statement, which pledges to involve the City of Berkeley and the school system "in activities during the years 1991-1992 to educate our citizens about the historical facts of the colonization of this hemisphere and its effects on indigenous people." Berkeley, the only city to be represented at the Encuentro, is extremely well received.

The National Congress, in a hall next door to where the legislators of Ecuador meet, is packed with well over a thousand people. On the wall behind the podium is a gigantic banner written partly in Quichua, partly in Spanish: "The struggle for land is the sovereignty of Latin America. 1992: not one more hacienda in Ecuador!" This is where the Encuentro will be officially opened. The proceedings will be bilingual, a simultaneous English translation available on headphones. I understand Spanish pretty fluently (much better than I can speak it), so I decide to wing it without headphones. Virginia Tully, from EAFORD, a human rights organization, tells me she went to find a rest room upstairs and it was swarming with police in riot gear. A group of musicians from Ota Valo, in dark felt hats, a long braid of hair hanging down behind, play rousing Andean music with guitars, flutes, panpipes, drums, and horns. The president of CONAIE opens the proceedings, followed by leaders from many different countries, each focusing on the specific struggles for survival and self-determination in their areas. At the end Rose Auger, from Canada, performs a beautiful ceremonial prayer.

We rush back to the hotel, stuff our luggage into waiting busses, and take off for the conference center, Campamento La Merced, about an hour and a half into the mountains. It is dusk when we arrive. Word circulates that the surrounding hills are crawling with police.

Scattered about are a variety of meeting rooms and facilities. In the center is a circus-sized tent, with many rows of benches. Nearby is a lake with a few rowboats. We are encircled by mountain peaks.

I am assigned to a small cabin with eight other men, all Indian, about half from the Pacific Northwest and Canada. Ray Williams, a Swinomish; Mark Kremen, a Yakima. I grab a lower in a triple-decker bunk bed. Dan, a Chicano from southern Texas, has found the showers in a building about halfway to the dining hall. I assume they're going to be crowded tonight, so I decide to get up very early.

Someone mentions that they are starting the sacred fire, so I head down to the lake. Ed Burnstick is there, Rose, her son Michael, and a group of others. Ed, it turns out, is one of the spiritual leaders. They light a kindling of grasses, nurture a small flame with twigs and sticks until it grows into a dancing blaze. Four men are honored to be firekeepers, with two alternates; they will make sure the flames stay healthy until the end of the Encuentro. Dawn ceremonies are scheduled every morning at 6 AM.

I wake at 5 and stagger in the dark toward the bath building. Halfway there I meet a man from my room, Tom, coming back. In the middle of his shower the lights and water suddenly went out. I fumble my way over and see the sad dripping faucets for myself.

I sit on my towel near the fire; the ground is damp and there is no room on the grass mats. In the sky I can see the constellation the Southern Cross. The women sit to the north of the fire, the men to the south. Ed announces that Rose, the primary spiritual leader, has received permission to break with tradition and briefly permit photographs during the pipe ceremony. The purpose of this is to show the reporters, who are there in force, that we have nothing to hide. Many people are unhappy with this decision but we continue. Smouldering sage is brought to each person; the smoke blesses each face and head. The pipe is filled with ceremonial tobacco, lit with grass braids. Each takes a drag, turns it once clockwise and passes it to the next. This is the first time in over twenty

years I have smoked tobacco, the first time ever ceremonially, and it makes me very high. Rose hands lengths of colored cloth, symbolizing the four directions, to different people, who circle the fire, then place the cloths as offerings into the flames. A thin crescent moon, cupped upward, rises between two peaks, and is followed by a glorious sunrise.

Before we disperse, a man in Andean clothes announces that tomorrow morning at 5 a.m., before the North American ceremonies, traditional Incan dawn ceremonies will be held.

At breakfast I hear that government harassment is suspected in the mysterious power outage and a delegation has gone to the Ministry of the Interior to complain.

We gather in the big tent. Everyone must choose one of eight simultaneous workshops to discuss different issue-areas for the next two days. Each workshop has literature to aid discussion. The topics are: the position of indigenous peoples on the 500th anniversary; Indian self-determination and political activity; education, culture and religion; indigenous organizing; women; land and natural resources; indigenous legislation; human rights and political prisoners. I choose to go to the 500th anniversary workshop.

It begins with a discussion of who can vote on resolutions. Delegates have different statuses: official, fraternal and observer. Each Indian nation, tribe or organization can have only one "official", the others being "fraternal". Non-Indians are almost entirely "observers", with a couple of "fraternal" exceptions including myself. However, on the workshop resolutions each country must choose only one voting member, to prevent domination by the large and well-represented countries. The North Americans are not too happy with this, and think it makes more sense for each Indian nation and tribe to have a vote. We are briefly stuck on the organizational differences between north and south. The south prevails. Each country caucuses, and the U.S. delegation chooses Lori, a young Cochiti-Diné woman from New Mexico as the voting official.

There is much unity on the issue. "We strongly reject the Quincentennial celebration, and firmly promise to convert it into an occasion to strengthen our process of continental unity and struggle toward our liberation."

A long list of resolutions and observations is worked on, to be brought before the entire conference, along with the resolutions from all the other commissions, on the last day.

Word circulates that today's Quito paper, only hours after the event, had a front page photo of the pipe ceremony with a caption saying that "pagan rituals" were being held in this Christian-owned conference center, implying some kind of defilement. Many traditional people are still unhappy that photos were permitted; some propose extinguishing the fire. But the decision is made to continue.

Suddenly the electricity and water come back on, and there is a rush for the showers.

Meanwhile the non-Indian participants begin to meet to write a statement of solidarity.

At lunch I am talking with Rafael Pandam and his friend Jesús, two men with long straight hair and bangs, from an area in the Amazon jungle near the town of Puyo, down

the sheer eastern slope of the Andes, by the headwaters of the world's greatest river. They explain that the entire Ecuadorian Amazon has been signed over as "concessions" to oil companies. These are destroying both the natural environment and the indigenous people, who have lived in relatively untouched isolation until recently. They invite me to come down to Puyo after the conference, to provide me with documentation so I can let the outside world know what is happening there.

I plan to fly to Cuenca in the southern highlands after the conference, and then return north slowly by bus, to see the entire country. They tell me I could easily turn east at the halfway point and detour down to the Amazon for a couple of days.

My next morning begins again in the dark by the fire. The Andean spiritual leader explains that he will lead the group in ancient dawn ceremonies that in Inca times were performed every morning, but which were banned by the early Spaniards. They have been preserved by a small number of people. He asks everyone to face east and quietly prays while burning coca leaves. Then sitting on his heels, he spreads his arms and brings his head slowly to the ground, loudly imploring Pacha Mama, the Earth, and Inti, the Sun. The group follows him in unison many times. Then he stretches his feet back and continues with a kind of push-up, which most people follow. It is very reminiscent of yoga dawn exercises. Tomorrow, he says, everyone should bring some unnatural article from the dominant civilization, which they will burn symbolically. Finally the moon appears, as yesterday morning, then quickly dawn, and as the light spreads, Rose and Ed pass the pipes. Several Guatemalan women walk on their knees around the fire. Rose gives a pinch of the ceremonial tobacco to everyone. "Keep it in a special place." They will also distribute ashes when the fire is finally extinguished.

But a controversy arises between the political and spiritual leaders. Rose says that for spiritual reasons it is very important that the Encuentro end here around the sacred fire, and not disperse back to the National Congress in Quito as planned. The Encuentro will be over when the fire is extinguished. The political leaders say they must return to Quito. There is a deadlock.

Back to the final workshop sessions, then in the afternoon a marathon plenary, bringing all the resolutions for full discussion. This lasts well into the night. During the report from the Indigenous Women's commission, there is a sudden uproar. The delegate from Nicaragua, several days late, has finally arrived, and the proceedings are interrupted for him to speak. Finally the political-spiritual controversy is resolved. Rose will go to Quito to deliver a prayer at the final plenary, then return to La Merced and ceremonially extinguish the fire.

A number of specific proposals are agreed to. An international Peoples' Tribunal should be constituted to judge the 1492 invasion. Indemnification should be paid to the Indian peoples. The United Nations should declare the right of self-determination of indigenous peoples. "Our definitive liberation can only express itself as the full exercise of our self-determination... Without Indian self-government and control of our lands, autonomy cannot exist." A campaign should be undertaken against the transnational corporations that are despoiling indigenous lands. The 500 Years Campaign should be constituted in national committees, with full participation of non-Indian "popular sectors", and continental coordination. The U.S. delegates should make these questions

issues in the 1992 presidential elections. “We demand respect for our right to life, to land, to free organization and expression of our culture... We affirm our decision to defend our culture, education and religion as fundamental to our identity as Peoples, reclaiming and maintaining our own forms of spiritual life and communal coexistence, in an intimate relationship with our Mother Nature... A new pluralist, democratic and humane society, in which peace is guaranteed, should be constructed.”

There will be future Encuentros, the next possibly in Guatemala, Cuba, or Oakland.

The main points are put into a document called the Declaration of Quito, which everyone present can sign at the end of the conference.

Next morning, 5 AM, Saturday, July 21st: the last fire dawn ceremony begins. The Inca exercise-prayers are repeated, followed by the symbolic burning — in a separate fire — of unnatural objects such as a soda can, a plastic fork, styrofoam packing. Then Rose and Ed bring out several pipes for the final ceremony. Certain people are honored for their extraordinary contributions, and testify before the fire. The firekeepers receive a special blessing. Rose asks if anyone has questions. The Latin Americans have many. They seem to recognize that the North American ceremonies are very close to the cultural source that they are seeking to return to, without the overlay of Catholicism that permeates many Indian ceremonies of Latin America.

The final colored cloth offerings are placed on the fire, and as they burn, I search the sky for the moon, but it is nowhere to be seen. The sun breaks brilliantly over the mountain. I realize that dawn on the last day has brought the fulfillment of the symbol of the Encuentro: the sun and moon are in conjunction; the sun has swallowed the moon.

I pack hurriedly; the busses are waiting. As I leave my room, an Ecuadorian Indian man in a red poncho, Manuel de la Cruz, pulls me aside. His community is on the lower slopes of the great snow-capped volcano Cotapaxi, about 100 miles away. His countryside is being devastated. Much of the Ecuadorian highlands, he explains, has been deforested. A national reforestation program, active in recent decades, has used foreign trees, eucalyptus and oregon pine, which grow rapidly, but their leaves and needles contain substances which ruin the earth so no crops will grow. He asks me if I know any North American organization that might help in replacing these destructive trees with native Ecuadorian ones.

I think of Eric from the organization Arctic to Amazon Alliance. But he is nowhere around. I assure Manuel that I will try to find him before the day ends.

At the bus I am talking to Marie-Helene Laraque of Haiti (and Canada) when I notice her name tag says Taino. I am stunned, as I thought that Columbus’ genocide of the Taino people of Caribbean was complete and total. She explains that even in genocide there are survivors. We board the busses and head down toward Quito.

It hadn’t hit me until now, but along the road are eucalyptus trees. I know them so well from their domination and sterilization of much of the California hills in Berkeley and Oakland, where a century ago they replaced a redwood forest that once grew so tall it was a landmark for ships entering the Golden Gate.

Inside the National Congress fills up.

Just as I sit down, Adela Principe Diego, in a traditional Peruvian dress, comes over to me, accompanied by Bobsy Draper. Adela has just been stopped at the entrance by an official from her embassy: “We hear you’ve been saying bad things about Peru. You will come to the embassy to talk about this.” Adela says that in her country many people — and their families — disappear for less cause than this. She asks if I will be part of a group she is organizing to go with her. I assure her I will.

Speeches are made, to a constant flash of bulbs. Rose takes the podium and weaves in a spiritual context. Musicians bring down the house. The Declaration of Quito is read, and passed around. As the president of CONAIE announces the Encuentro at an end, I sign the Declaration.

Then back on the busses for festivities at Huaycopungo, a town in the mountains near the weaving center of Ota Valo.

I am in the lead bus, flying the rainbow CONAIE flag on a pole taped to the sideview mirror, the ancient banner of the Incas. At first the land is barren, desert, with occasional stands of eucalyptus. Then as we get higher, it becomes greener, and we are in farm country. To my disappointment I see no llamas, only typical barnyard animals. Someone says llamas are not used here any more but are still common in Peru.

Suddenly we stop by a gravel road, where a crowd with banners and signs welcomes us. Is this Huaycopungo, where the fiesta is? No, this is Pijal, this is different, you’ll see. We walk down the road, teeter on logs across a swampy stretch, across a meadow. A stallion, his eyes wild, runs toward us; the crowd breaks to let him through. We cross a recently-plowed field to a small settlement where about two hundred children, women and men are gathered.

We form a wide circle around a volleyball court; a woman steps forward and explains: this land has always belonged to the community of Pijal, as far back as anyone knows. But this land was stolen by the rich hacendados, and the people suffered hardships for generations. Now in the great Indigenous Uprising we the people of Pijal have taken back our land and have begun to farm it and we will never let it be stolen from us again.

In her simple statement, in the determined expressions on the faces around me, I see a people who have passed beyond hopelessness and have rediscovered hope. I am incredibly moved.

Then on to Fiesta Huaycopungo. We line up and get our dinner of corn, salsa and beef in a small brown paper bag. Sitting on an empty lot near several pigs, in the distance I see Lake San Pablo. Everyone drifts down to a field near the town’s center, where the entire population is gathering.

Suddenly I notice Eric and asked him about reforestation. He says this is exactly the kind of project his organization does. I glance around, pick out the red poncho of Manuel, and bring them together.

Word arrives that two others have been called before their embassies, a Guatemalan and — surprise — a Nicaraguan, both women.

As darkness sets in, the horizon begins to flash with heat lightning. A group of four horsemen suddenly appear, bearing red flags, followed by masked and costumed men on foot, one with a dog face, one in a sack and carrying a chicken, one with a wheel on top of a pole, oranges and bananas tied to it. Another horseman follows, wearing a mask with strings of colored beads hanging down his face, shaded by a black umbrella. They ride once around the field, then into the center, where those on foot dance in a circle. I ask a nearby man for an explanation. He says the horsemen with the red pennants appear at the planting time fiesta, and the bead-faced man, named Corasas, appears every year after the harvest.

Then music and dancing begin in earnest, one band after the other. All join hands and dance in long chains which keep changing direction. Men carrying soda bottles full of firewater called trago ply everyone with toasts. Then traditional and choreographed dance groups come on one after another.

Suddenly a man pulls me aside, introduces himself as a reporter from a newspaper in Spain, asks if he can interview me, and wants to know why I'm here. I try to tell him but can hardly find the words. He says, "Don't you think it's patronizing for a North American to come down here and be part of this?"

Before I can answer, three Ecuadorian Indian men offer us a toast. The reporter asks one of them, "Wouldn't you like to be rich?"

The man responds, "Sure."

The Spaniard turns back to me and says, "See, all this stuff about communal land, when in reality they're just capitalists like everybody else." There is a touch of desperation on his face.

I realize that he came here with a certain story in mind but couldn't find it.

The busses are leaving back to Quito. The fiesta will continue all night. Those who stay are welcome to sleep on some mats in the communal hall. At the last minute I feel very tired, and decide to return to Quito.

At the hotel I meet some old friends: Rupert from the Maroon colony in Jamaica; Irvine, from the island of Dominica; Cindi Alvitre, a California Gabrieleña; Ed, Rose, Paul Haible and Nilok Butler, Eugene Hasgood from Big Mountain, so many more.

In the hotel hall I get into a conversation with a young woman. At first I think she has been at the Encuentro, but then she tells me she is part of a group of four Columbians who recently had to flee their country because they had been working for social change. In a couple months their Ecuadorian visas will expire and they will be expelled. If they are forced to return to Columbia, they will probably be killed. They are looking for a third country to escape to. Do I know of any human rights organization that might help them?

The next day, Monday, July 23, I am scheduled to go to the Peruvian embassy with Adela and a group of others. Then on Tuesday I am due to fly south. But it turns out that Monday is a national holiday, Simon Bolivar's birthday. I agonize over it, then decide that enough people will be going to the embassy without me.

Down in the southern highlands, I walk around Cuenca a bit, then hit the road. An incredible two days by bus through the mountains, by pickup truck to Inga Pirca, the only complete Inca ruins in Ecuador, with an oval sun temple.

Then down, straight down, to the Amazon, following the Río Pastaza, along hairpin turns, great precipices, rope bridges, waterfalls everywhere, one cascading over the top of the bus, washed-out roads, jungle vegetation, a bad tire, a crate of chicks peeping all the way. Stop at the military base in the town called Shell, once the oil center of the country. Check my passport. What are you doing here? Tourist, two days. Not far away is the border, a huge area that Peru stole in a war in 1941, and that Ecuador still disputes today. Relations between the two countries are still not the best.

I finally arrive in Puyo and take a taxi into the jungle to the office of CONFENAIE, one of the Indian organizations making up CONAIE.

As bad luck would have it, my friends Rafael and Jesús are not there, but will be back Friday, too late for me. At first I am crestfallen, but then talk to the secretary, Luisa, and Luis Vargas, the president. They show me a map of the area. The entire Amazon is cut up among Texaco, Conoco, Tenneco, ESSO, BP and other companies I don't recognize. Shell, the original perpetrator, decided that better profits were elsewhere, and is long gone.

The destruction by the oil and logging companies is mostly visible from the air. Just as in our country, they leave "view corridors" around highways so drivers can remain unaware of the devastation behind the thin wall of trees. It is so bad, they tell me, that if this continues, the Ecuadorian Amazon will be a desert in twenty years.

Back on the bus, creeping up the mountain passes. We stop at a narrow place; the driver's helper gets out, looks up and motions ambiguously. The driver cautiously begins again. But most of the people in the bus shout No! and he stops. The man next to me says, "Landslide." Rocks are tumbling down from the hill about thirty feet in front of us. We get out to watch. A few rocks at a time for about ten minutes, then suddenly a large chunk of hill comes loose, and six foot boulders hurdle down, completely blocking the road. A half hour later bulldozers clear it and we hurry on.

I spend my last days back north in Ota Valo, a weaving center famous since before the Incas came to Ecuador from Peru in the 1400s. I wander through their incredible Saturday market. In the central plaza is a statue of Rumiñahui, leader of the resistance to the Spanish invasion and Indian Ecuador's national hero. It is a time of reflection.

For the Indian peoples, 1992 represents the culmination of 500 years of invasion and occupation. It also represents 500 years of resistance and struggle for self-determination. The former is cause to grieve and the latter cause to celebrate.

The First Continental Conference has put the consciousness of American indigenous peoples on a new and higher level. For the first time they have formed a network using the latest communications technology and are in constant contact on a hemispheric level. For the first time they are coordinating their common struggles for self-determination.

But what about those of us who are not of Indian blood? I think our civilization has not yet made its peace with this continent: we are on it but not yet of it. We are not yet indigenous. To become indigenous people, European-Americans must first make our

peace with history and with the Indian people. What has been lost in the European-American version of liberty, is community. We have gained mobility but have paid the price of rootlessness. The Indians' struggle for control of their communities can light the way.

They say that Latinos will become the majority in California in twenty years. Most of these are people of Indian blood. And there are about 300,000 Native California Indians today, almost the population before the coming of the Spaniards.

The U.S. government is calling the 1992 commemoration a "jubilee". I looked up "jubilee" in the dictionary, and to my surprise it read, "a year-long celebration held every fifty years in ancient Israel, in which all bondsmen were freed and alienated lands were restored to their original owners."

Every society has creation myths, and the Columbus story is inextricably tied up to the American one. I bought a children's book recently that lays it out just as I heard it many years ago. Columbus the visionary explorer stumbles on a New World where he is welcomed by primitive Indians, who are awed by Europe's superior cultural gifts. The children's story ends with Columbus returning to Spain with the amazing news.

But of course the reality was far different, and did not end there. Columbus returned to the New World with a great armada, and proceeded to conquer and plunder wherever he went. His own writings clearly show that this had always been his plan. Columbus invented European imperialism and the slave trade in the Western Hemisphere.

Yet generation after generation of North Americans, immigrants and their descendants, have clung to the childhood myth and the illusion, because the reality is so shockingly brutal.

Perhaps it is time for us to grow up and face the historic realities of the European invasion of the Americas in all its pain, time for us to turn to a new mythology, based on truth instead of lies.

In looking for new myths, where is there to turn but backwards, to the very oldest stories of our hemisphere. Here in America (or in Appia-Yala, as they say in the Andes), perhaps our greatest hope for a livable future lies in the joining of the Condor's and Eagle's tears.