

28 de julio...My connection and affection for Peru... Belaunde's acknowledgment of the people... Impact on me... The next step... In Peru... Thoughts about Peru... It would take a book.

All, for most people today is July 28, 2026 but if you are in Peru it is 28 de julio, Peruvian Independence Day.

My connection and affection for Perú...

In March 1965, I read the cover story of *TIME* about Fernando Belaundé Terry, the president of Perú. His personal story and his political philosophy captured my attention.

Belaundé, although born to privilege, was not a remote person. He related to, not just Perú, but to the people as well. Actually, I believe that he would have spelled the word people as *People*. He recognized significance of individual Peruvians.

Belaundé's acknowledgement of the People...

In order to know the country, to be ready to lead it, Belaundé traveled from one end of the country to the other. When you look at a map of Perú you will quickly realize that such travel would not be easy during the late 1950s and early 1960s when he was studying and exploring his nation. (There were no SUVs, just jeeps, horses to ride, and some trains, small planes and small boats. It was a rugged adventure for him.)



In each town he would notice a building, a public building such as a school, or a church, even a road. He would always ask, “Who built this?” The answer was always the same, “The people did it.”

From the phrase – “The people did it” Belaundé developed the expression, “*El pueblo lo hizo*.” (Translation: “The People did it.”) This straightforward observation became far more than a slogan. It was embraced as the unifying factor binding together the citizens of a remarkable country.

Impact on me...

To me the merits of *El pueblo lo hizo* were obvious. This understanding of what community is, group cooperative effort motivated me, a journalism student at Penn, to travel to Perú, meet President Belaundé, and write about him. All of this seemed quite logical to my 19-year-old self.

The next step...

I wanted to know more about Perú, so I looked for a Peruvian student at the University of Pennsylvania. It turns out that I was remarkably lucky. The fellow that I met, Rafael Pastor, turned out to be the nephew of the President. After he sized me up, he provided me with letters of introduction to close friends of his. These letters literally changed my life.

In Perú...

I arrived in Perú the day after Christmas of 1965. I immediately contacted the fellows for whom I had letters of introduction. To make a long story short, within 24 hours of arriving in Perú I was invited to stay with Javier Seoane's family. They embraced me with a warmth that could not have anticipated. And it is a warmth that continues to this day despite time and distance.

During this first visit I was met by Elsa Arana Freire, the editor of *Siete Dias*, the Sunday magazine of La Prensa, a powerful Peruvian newspaper. She offered me a job on the magazine. Of course, I accepted. Elsa Arana Freire was a brilliant person. She provided me with needed insights into various situations in the country. Every editor I worked with since that has been a disappointment by comparison.

Thoughts about Perú...

Perú, like the rest of Latin America, has been underestimated by the United States. The country was once described as *Un mendigo en un banco de oro* (translated: "A beggar sitting on a golden bench."). Not true at all. I really believe that the rest of the world would like to be on that golden bench with them, sharing it. And not as beggars.

It would take a book...

It is impossible for me to capture impact and meaning of Perú in my life in this column. It would take a book. Or, a much longer essay, at a minimum.

My hope is that I have been able to convey at least a sliver of the impact of my time there. I am not exaggerating when I say that it set the course of my life much as Albert Payson Terhune has.

There is not a day that goes by when my friends there do not pass through my thoughts.
¡Feliz 28 de julio a mi familia en el Perú!

First yawn...

Until tomorrow...

Ken

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