

Market Town Saturday Night

28 June 2008

We broke the rule.

We knew the rule. We knew it very well. It was kind of hard not to know the rule since we wrote it ourselves.

It is a simple rule. A just a few words rule. An easy to understand, easy to implement rule.

It has become a cardinal rule. A hard and fast rule. An under-no-circumstances-will-this-be-broken-rule.

We broke the rule.

It happened like this.

We got a bit of a late start, which for anyone who has ever been around us, should come as no surprise.

We dawdled along the way to look at interesting things, talk to some people and take some pictures, which for anyone who has ever been around us should also come as no surprise.

The road over the mountains to the remote town was steep, serpentine and included waddling water trucks even slower than us, meaning a very slow transit, which for anyone who has followed our Fuso in the steep mountain twisties, should certainly come as no surprise.

The upside was that by the time we reached the mining town where a bishop in the 1800s built a Basilica sized to hold 10,000 souls, the dying light of the day was perfect for shooting.

We pulled in as any one of the 100,000 pilgrims do when they all gather at the Basilica between December 24 and 26. We too, had journeyed from the Pacific. Of course, many of the 100,000 pilgrims walk the entire way, including every inch of the 3,331 feet / 1,015 meters of vertical elevation. A hardy and faithful lot, those pilgrims. We drove.

Which might, right there, in and of itself, explain what happened when we broke our own rule.

And let there be no doubt about it.

We broke the rule.

As the golden hour of light drew to a close, we knew there was no other choice. We had to break the rule. We had to turn our back on the hardest won lesson, on the immutable law, on the indisputable maxim.

Never enter a new town on a weekend night.

That is the rule.

It is a very good rule.

We broke the rule.

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Life in remote areas of developing countries is often devoid of creative, healthy activities and diversions. Even worse, it is often devoid of opportunity. Worse even than that, it is therefore devoid of hope.

People with not much to do, not much to aspire to and no hope of finding either tend to do one thing on the weekends – work very hard at forgetting about it.

That work typically includes loud music, members of the opposite sex, mating dances, competition, confrontation, jokes, laughter, camaraderie, bonding, shared experiences, thrill seeking, challenges, minimal amounts of food and copious, gargantuan, titanic quantities of fermented and distilled alcoholic beverages. All elements are combined in various orders, mixtures and speeds; shaken, not stirred.

The process starts as early as 7PM, but doesn't really get going until midnight, with no clear indicators until 2AM, is in optimum and complete manifestation from 3AM to 5AM and slowly drains down until it tinkles out about 8AM, just before the first full chorus of the church bells at 9AM.

This scenario is the same in just about every out-of-the-way town in remote places in developing countries everywhere in the world. Which, as it turns out, is exactly where we like to travel: out-of-the-way towns in remote places in developing countries everywhere in the world.

About the only thing that varies is the scale of the carnage. Small village, small deal; small town, medium deal; market town, serious action. Market towns draw vendors and buyers for the weekend. Many of them come out to play. Market towns have larger populations. Many of them also come out to play. Market towns can be big events on weekends. People travel from miles and miles around to market towns for the weekends. They all travel to come out and play.

We were in a market town.

We broke the rule.

We both fell asleep pretty early. Steph woke up at 11 and was up until 3AM. I woke up about the time she fell asleep and was awake until about 6:30 or 7AM. We both did the same things all night long: listen to the music and try to pick out a comprehensible beat, lyric or tune; attempt to discern the number of people in the group passing on the sidewalk; identify the sexual mix of the groups passing on the sidewalk; gauge the level of intoxication of the individuals and the overall group as they passed, stopped, yelled, strutted, confronted, almost-fought, yelped, cooed, wept, giggled, cackled, guffawed, beat on the camper, and shouted for us to come out and play. Other than that we didn't do much, except of course, prayed for dawn.

But we didn't deserve dawn. After all, we broke the rule.

The rule states clearly you never enter a new town on a weekend without enough time to seek a plan B if the town feels ugly or there is no safe, reasonably quiet, out of the action, place to park.

But, there we were, learning all the possible ways to say in Spanish, "Wake up! Come out and drink with us!"

We deserved it. We broke the rule.

About the time the 10th guy played bongos on the camper I was deeply developed on end game scenarios. Of course, they were all ridiculous. The worst possible thing to do with a young, drunk, sexually frustrated male who just watched all the other guys score a babe is confront him. It makes throwing gasoline on a fire look like an excellent idea. About all you can do is lay there and wait for them to get bored and move on back to the bar or finally stumble home.

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Besides, how was this going to play out in court?

Judge: So, señor rich American Hackney, you seriously injured young, impoverished Señor Vargas, is that correct?

Doug: Well, yes, technically...

Judge: And, señor rich American Hackney, you seriously injured young, impoverished Señor Vargas for what reason?

Doug: Well, he was beating on our camper and we were scared.

Judge: You were scared? Is that what you are saying? You were scared?

Doug: Well, yes, YES, that's right judge, we were scared, very scared, why just...

Judge: Señor rich American Hackney, you are saying you were scared while you were parked exactly between the most holy Basilica and the blessed Templo Antiguo, home of the image of the Virgen del Rosario and filled with centuries of holy relics brought one by one by millions of pilgrims who walked to that holy ground on their pious feet? Señor rich American Hackney, you are saying you were scared in a place where young women were walking alone, unescorted, down the very sidewalk you were parked next to? Señor rich American Hackney, you are saying you were scared enough in that spot to seriously injure young, impoverished Señor Vargas?

At this point in my fantasy my lawyer leans over and whispers in my ear, "Señor Vargas is the judge's wife's cousin's nephew."

"What?" I hiss back. "Are you kidding me? Is everyone here related to the judge?"

The clock ticks. The courtroom walls close in on me.

"Well, not everyone I guess," my lawyer replies. "I, myself, I am not related to the judge. But I did run over his favorite dog last week."

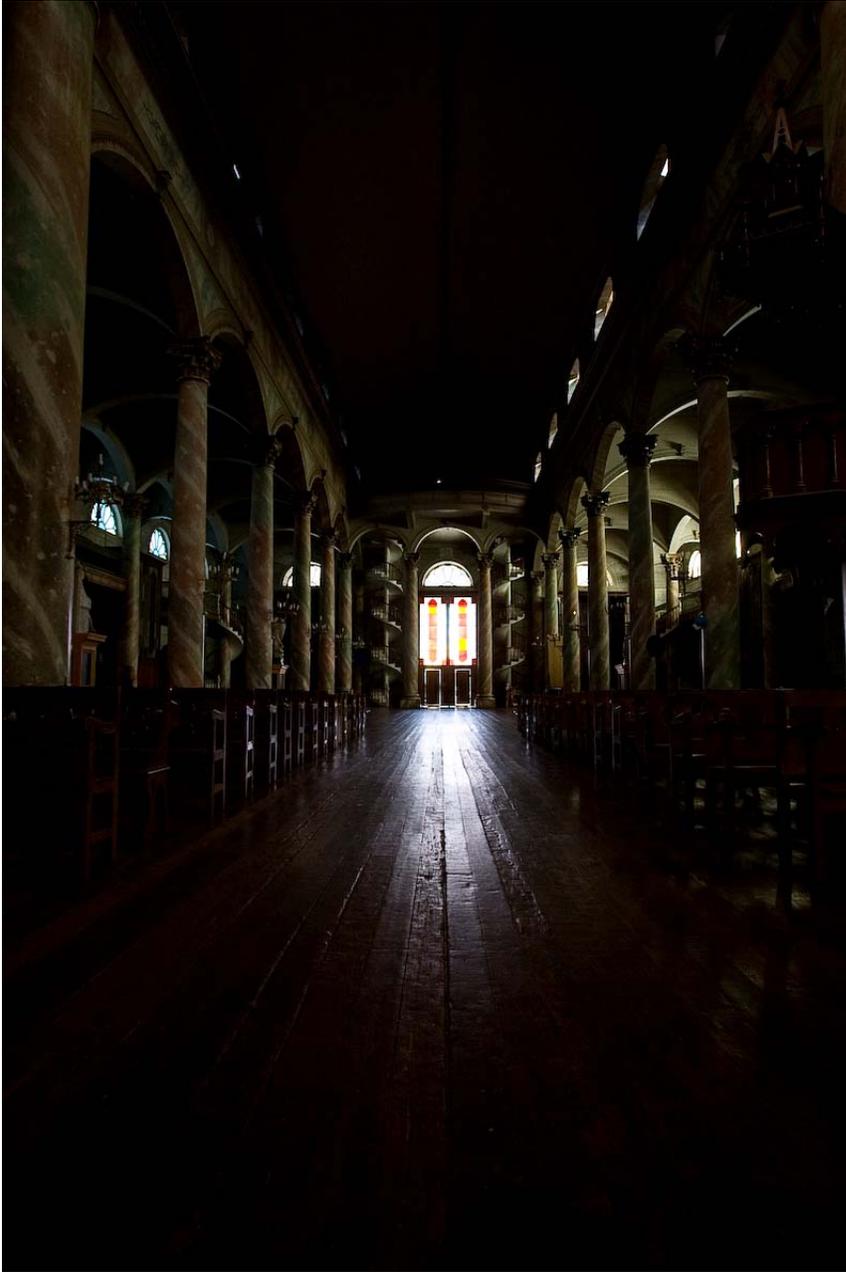
And so my fantasies went, all night long.

But, as I said earlier, I deserved them. I deserved all of it.

It was a new town on a weekend.

It was a market town Saturday night.

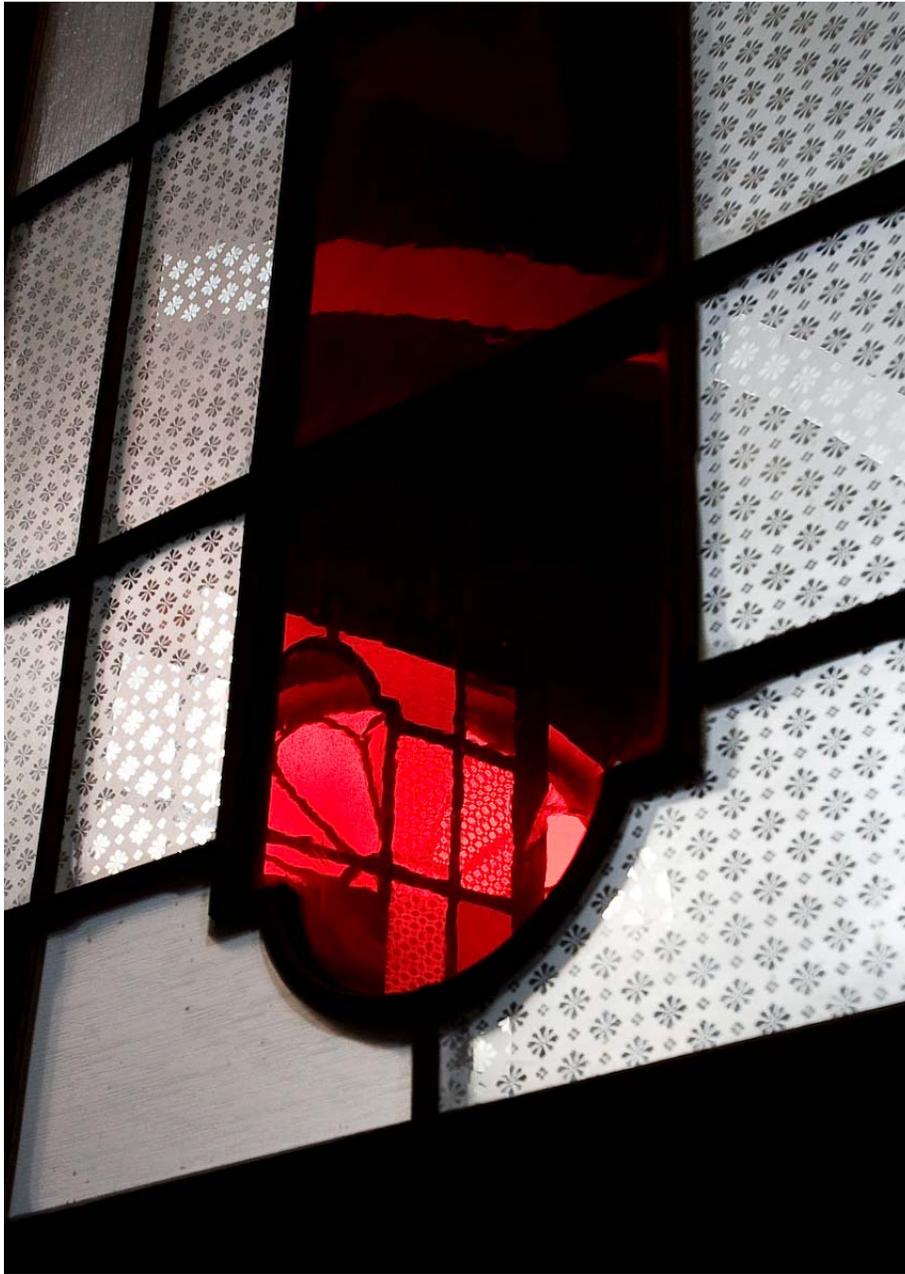
We broke the rule.



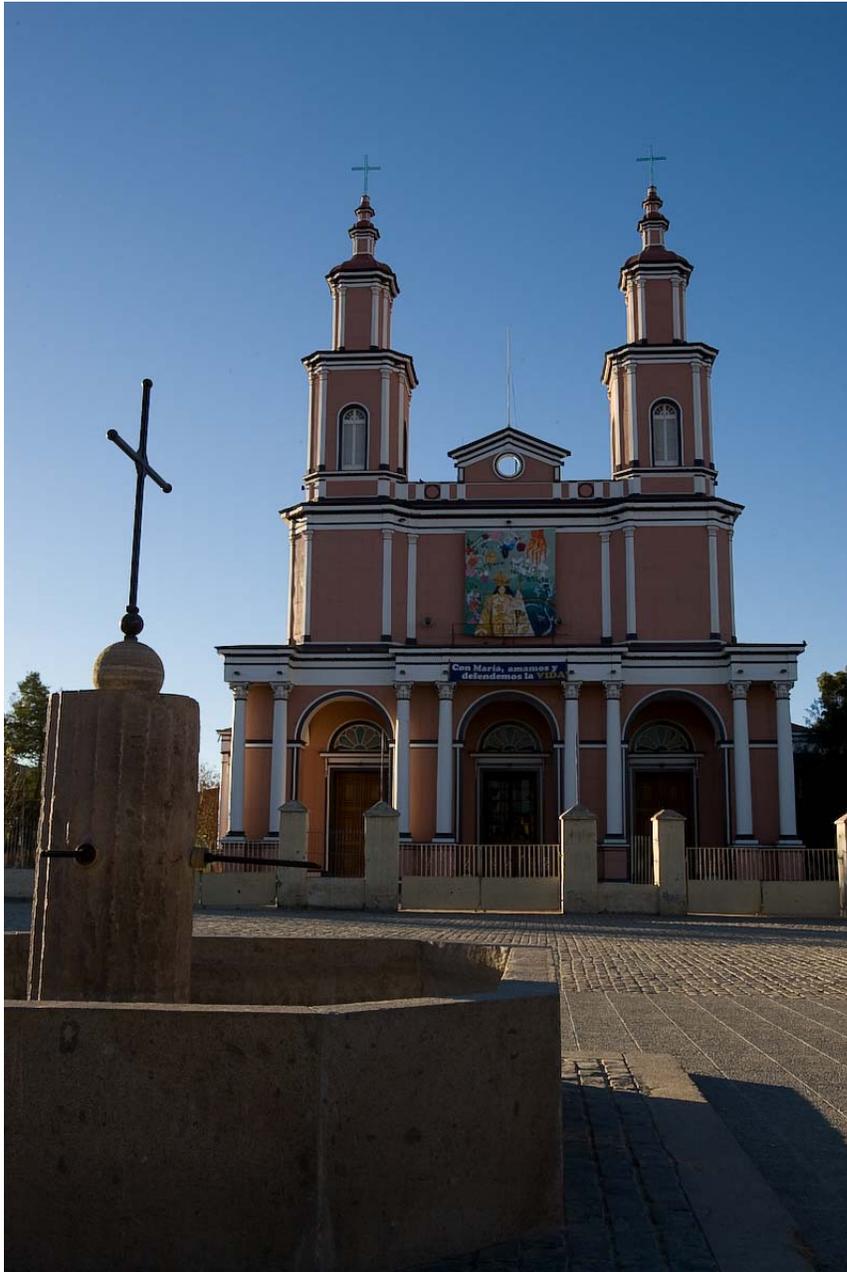
Basilica interior



Basilica interior



Basilica door glass detail



Basilica exterior



Virgen del Rosario figurines in Templo Antigo museum gift shop storeroom



Funeral flowers, Templo Antiguo steps



Padre conducting baptism, Templo Antiguo



Our bread man



Whatever was once worth locking, is not anymore. Doorway on main street.



Radio America – closed

Market Town Saturday Night



Life in a rural town - nowhere to go and nothing to do when you get there



Waiting for Saturday night to begin

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The market town was Andacollo, Chile, S30.23262 W71.08519.

According to legend, La Virgen del Rosario, also known as la Virgen Morena, or Dark Lady, appeared to an indigenous miner called "Collo" in the form of a small wooden statuette hidden in rocks. The statue told the newly converted Collo to build up a church at the place where Andacollo is located today. Since many miracles are attributed to la Virgen Morena (such as stopping the small pox epidemic of 1871) the city celebrates the Virgin every year on December 24th to 26th.

Templo Antiguo is a small church on the side of the plaza. It was erected in 1789 and is the place where the image of the Virgen del Rosario is venerated all year round. It has been a Chilean National Monument since 1981.

The Basilica, or Templo Grande, took twenty years to build and was inaugurated in 1893. It was declared a basilica by His Holiness John Paul II in 1998. It was declared a Chilean National Monument in 1981.

There are two festivals in honor of the Virgen de Andacollo: the Fiesta Chica on the first Sunday in October and the Fiesta Grande on December 26.

All photos by Douglas Hackney



Photo by Jorge Valdes

Douglas and Stephanie Hackney are on a two to three year global overland expedition.
You can learn more about their travels at: <http://www.hackneys.com/travel/index.htm>