Waiting for the Call
Taylor, Jacqueline

Published by University of Michigan Press

Taylor, Jacqueline.
Waiting for the Call: From Preacher’s Daughter to Lesbian Mom.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/65905.
When are we going to visit Peru?” Lucy asked again. She was beginning to sound exasperated. We had been talking about this trip for years.

It was the spring of 1998. Lucy was nine. I looked at her. She and Gracie were at an age where they loved making trips with their family. They were poised in that precious interval between early childhood and puberty, old enough to have a clear sense of the outside world, young enough to center their lives in their family. It was time, I thought.

“Let’s start saving for it today,” I replied. “Let’s get a jar for a Peru fund, and whenever we have any extra money, let’s throw it into the jar.” Lucy loved this idea. She had a picture book about a girl who helped her mother save every spare penny until they could afford to replace a chair destroyed when their apartment burned. Lucy liked it when life imitated art. She tore down to the basement and returned with a large plastic pitcher. We sat it on the desk in the kitchen. Right away, she threw in two dollars saved from her allowance. I emptied my pockets of change. There was no turning back now.

Carol contacted a travel agency that specialized in creating two-week group tours to countries of origin for international adoptees and their
families. One of our friends and her adopted Peruvian daughter had made such trip a year earlier, with a group of other adoptive families, and had come home telling good stories about the experience. Carol learned that a Peru trip was scheduled for August 1999. We signed on.

During the next year, if we got any unexpected money or found a way to spend less than we expected, we deposited whatever we had gained into the Peru pitcher. The girls counted our accumulation obsessively, dumping the loose change and dollar bills onto the living room floor, sorting the bills, and stacking the coins into neat towers. After a few months, we opened a bank account. Although the Peru fund ultimately supplied only a fraction of the cost of our trip, it gave the girls a way to participate actively in making our dream a reality. I was surprised to see them deposit not only portions of their allowance but even gift money from grandparents and aunts and uncles.

Although she cheerfully tossed money into the pitcher and thoroughly enjoyed the money-counting sessions, Gracie was much less interested than her sister in thinking about the future. Once, when I was talking with the girls about vacation plans, Gracie stopped me cold. “I don’t like future planning,” she said, and it was true. She has always had an enormous gift for living in the moment. She had not pressed for this trip, as Lucy had, and she was not altogether sure she wanted to go. Although Gracie is inclined by disposition to take each day pretty much as it comes, she doesn’t like to be away from home and her animals for very long.

As we planned our trip, Carol and I worried about whether the expectations the girls had for this vacation could possibly be met. Lucy had been longing to travel back to Peru for at least as long as she could talk. This longing was connected, I was certain, to her desire to find her mother and other family members and in some way reunite with her clan. Such a reunion would probably not be possible on this tightly scheduled trip, particularly since we no longer knew where her mother was or how we might try to reach her. I wondered if we were going to great expense and trouble only to produce a massive disappointment.

I talked to Lucy about the likelihood that we would not be able to uncover any news about her mother, but I was not sure how well she understood this. And in truth I had not entirely dislodged my own fantasies about arranging the perfect reunion for her.
One day, a few months prior to the trip, some friends were visiting. We eagerly described our travel plans. Lucy and I sat together on the couch. I tucked my bare toes under her knee. She rested her hand on my ankle. As we talked about our impending trip, our friend said, “That sounds like a wonderful adventure.”

“Yes,” I said. “We’ll just have to go down there and see what and who we find.”

“And what and who we don’t find,” Lucy added, shooting a meaningful look in my direction. I knew then that she understood the tenuous nature of our dreams at least as well as I did.

Still, we worried about the likely gap between the trip they were expecting and the one we could provide. We had no way of reconnecting with Gracie’s family of origin. We were not certain we could find any trace of Lucy’s. Given these uncertainties and potential disappointments, we decided we’d better find out what the girls wanted to do in Peru that we could guarantee.

“I want to see a llama,” Lucy told us, “and Machu Picchu.” Easy enough. Both were inevitable on this particular trip. “But most of all, I want to see the Nazca lines.”

“Yes,” said Gracie, who had talked much less about the trip than Lucy. “We have to see the Nazca lines.”

At first we told them all the reasons we could not. They were not on the tour. Adding this leg to our journey would extend our stay a couple of days and cost even more money. Peru was a big country, and we couldn’t hope to see it all in one visit. We would be traveling to Peru again, and next time we would include the Nazca lines. But at Inter-American Magnet School, all third graders learned about the mysterious geometric figures etched into the gravel of the desert plane near the town of Nazca along the southern coast of Peru. Some of these figures form the shape of a spider monkey, a hummingbird, and a condor. Some are just mysterious shapes whose meaning is not known. These giant figures are clearly visible only from the air, yet they are hundreds of years old and have left scientists, anthropologists, and everyone else wondering why and how they were created. The mystery of the lines captured the imaginations of the third graders. The children at Inter-American learned about Maria Reiche, a German mathematician who spent decades in Peru studying
the lines. They each made their own three-dimensional model of their favorite Nazca drawing, a project that involved construction paper, glue, and kitty litter. By now we had one of these gritty compositions tucked away in our basement stash of school projects and another drying on the window ledge in Mr. Emmer’s third-grade classroom. Lucy had talked about the Nazca lines incessantly when she studied them the year before, and now, as we made the final plans for our trip, Gracie’s imagination was fired by the same subject.

At last, Carol and I decided the girls’ desire to see the lines was more important than our budget. We pulled out our credit card and added a final leg to the journey.

By the time we boarded the flight from Chicago to Miami, excitement was running at almost lethal levels. Our beautiful new suitcases had been packed tight and carefully tagged with the special labels provided by the travel agency. Our animal friends, Bonnie, Big Boy, and Brenda Starr, had been handed over to the care of friends. We were off.

Gracie worried about air travel. Flying made her stomach feel funny. She sat nervously across the aisle from me. When the takeoff went smoothly, she started to feel more optimistic about being airborne. She and Lucy donned their earphones and began flipping channels on the dials on the consoles between their seats but, perhaps to reassure herself that I was nearby, Gracie tapped my arm every few minutes.


Tap, tap, tap. Tap, tap, tap. “Can I get some 7UP?”

“Sure, honey, knock yourself out. You’re on vacation.”

“Will you go to the bathroom with me?” I would.

“How long until we get to eat? Are we almost there?”

“I don’t want the rest of my meal. Can I throw it away?”

Then, “I think that girl two rows in front of us is on our trip. She has tags like ours on her luggage, and her hair is black and her skin is brown, but her parents are not brown.” Gracie gestured toward a girl of about eight or nine who was sitting two rows in front of us with her middle-aged parents. I had noticed her, too. The girls were experts at picking out other adopted children. We surveyed the other passengers. It
looked as if there were at least two other families who might be part of our group.

In Miami, the little streams of Peruvian adoptee families began to flow together. We introduced ourselves to the families we had seen on the plane. Then, as we began to make our way through the terminal to our connecting flight to Lima, we encountered still more families. They were easy to pick out of a crowd. The children were all between the ages of seven and thirteen. The parents were thirty-five, forty, or even fifty years older. And, as Gracie had put it, all the children had black hair and brown skin, but the parents were not brown.

At the gate, we had an hour and a half wait. Lucy and Gracie whipped out a deck of cards, and soon the children were in the thick of a spirited and noisy game. Clustered around them, the adults talked, as adoptive parents will, about how old our children were when we got them and in what year we had traveled to Peru. We named the village or city where each child was born. We compared the length of time it had taken to complete each adoption.

I was already choked up, and we hadn’t even embarked for Peru. Why was this so moving? In part, it was seeing this group of thirteen beautiful Peruvian children together. Although Lucy and Gracie attended a school whose population was about 65 percent Latino, I was not used to seeing them surrounded by so many children who resembled them so strongly. But perhaps even more moving for me was looking at all these other adoptive families and thinking about how we had come to be. We were all in Peru adopting our children at approximately the same time. When we completed our paperwork and sent it to the adoption agency, we received a referral to the next available baby. What if we had sent in our paperwork on a different day? What if Lucy and Gracie had landed in some other family (or families)? The process for assigning the children to families was a random one, and yet it seemed to me (and, I guessed, to all of the parents) that we had received the children meant for us.

I wondered if this trip would cause any of the children to speculate on how they might just as easily have landed in a different family. If they thought about it, would they feel relief that it had worked out as it did or would some of them suspect that a different assignment could have pro-
duced a better fit? Biological children sometimes look at their friends’ parents and think either “There but for the grace of God . . .” or “Why couldn’t I have had those parents?” Surely similar thoughts might occur to our children.

I thought about how different Lucy’s and Gracie’s lives might be if they had landed with the middle-aged couple from a small town in Wisconsin with the almost grown daughter or with the free spirits from Hawaii who seemed content to let other parents ride herd on their three children (or not) while they relaxed and enjoyed their vacation. I looked at the other children, so familiar to me because of the ways in which they resembled my own and yet so unfamiliar. I looked at my own girls, who I knew right down to the last freckle and cadence. I knew without looking just how each one of their toenails was shaped. I wanted to hug them in relief and celebration that these two girls of ours had found their way to us, right where they belong.

As the trip unfolded, I came to believe that all the children were well matched with their parents. Was this, I wondered again, a story we adoptive parents tell ourselves for comfort or had fate brought us all together according to some grand design? Was God present in the creation of our families? For Carol’s and my family, I was certain that our lives were entwined in a particular and predestined pattern, certain that we had been called to parent these two special girls, and equally certain that I needed to believe this was so.

Our tour catered to the needs and interests of our thirteen children. On our first full day in Lima, we visited museums and various sites of interest. We also visited an orphanage, one with personal significance for one of the little girls on our tour. She had lived there until she was nine months old, and ever since she and her family had maintained contact with the orphanage. Now she was welcomed back to her first home with warm hugs and kisses. She wore a shy, lopsided grin as the director enfolded her curly black head against her chest. Our children presented gifts to the orphanage. Then we spent time playing with some of the toddlers and babies who lived there. These little ones ran toward us with their arms outstretched. We lifted them up and sniffed their sweet-smelling heads. We remembered our own babies, the feel and smell of
them, babies who had now grown into children scampering around the room and holding babies themselves.

The staff members walked us through the orphanage. It was clean and well-organized, with courtyards and gardens and playgrounds. Children were assigned dormitories by gender and age. The workers seemed to care deeply for the little ones entrusted to them. Yet it was hard to think of children growing up here without families of their own. We walked through a room with twin beds lined up in a row along the wall, much like the beds of the girls in the Madeline books. Each was neatly made, with tightly tucked corners. At the top of each bed lay a little doll, each identical and each in precisely the same spot, her little doll head barely denting the center of the pillow. Somehow, that symmetrical row of perfectly positioned dolls spoke not of play and companionship but of institutionalized care, loneliness, and loss.

The children on our tour enjoyed meeting other children who were Peruvian adoptees, and within a few days they had formed a group. The girls even began to dress alike in matching hand-knitted Peruvian caps. Meals were often lavish buffets with deliciously fresh seafood and produce prepared in wonderful sauces. While the parents filled their plates with local delicacies, the children ate french fries and drank Inca colas and longed for the food of their homeland. Much of the time, we traveled by bus. The children rode together in back while the parents gravitated to the front. We had plenty of time to do what parents of children often do together—talk about the joys and challenges of raising our kids. But in this case we had the added commonality of international adoption to talk over.

The parents recalled how difficult our earlier trips to Peru had been, the trips we had made to adopt our children. Peru as a country was doing better than when we had been there nine or ten years earlier. And of course we now had the pleasure of a well-organized trip to beautiful sites, whereas before we had faced the frustrations and challenges of seeing an adoption through while caring for a new baby. But for Carol and me there was an added pleasure in our return. Now we were able to travel as a family rather than masquerading as two single women adopting independently.

The families on our trip began to see how we were all linked by circumstances and yet distinct. Most parents tried to give their children
some additional link to their past. In some cases, this meant an actual reunion with a biological mother or other relatives. In others, a visit to an orphanage or the hospital where the child was born was all that was possible. Witnessing the range of experiences was helpful to our family, for it underscored the point that everyone’s story was a little bit different and yet connected to the stories of many others.

With the help of our tour leader, Bea, we located the hospital where Gracie was born on the outskirts of Lima. The drive took more than an hour from our hotel in Miraflores. We drove past neighborhood after neighborhood of what are known as *pueblos jóvenes*, or “young towns,” a term that belies the grim conditions of these makeshift neighborhoods.

The city of Lima is ringed with hundreds of *pueblos jóvenes*, which spring up as thousands of Indians leave their homes in the Andes and come to the city in search of a better life. The houses they construct have walls made of grass mats. Many have dirt floors. Running water and electricity are not available. The hills on which these neighborhoods perch are bare and brown. Near the top of the hill, the name of the neighborhood is often etched in white letters. Sometimes, higher still, there stands a large cross. One hillside holds a giant statue of Jesus.

At last, we reached the hospital. Gracie had fallen fast asleep in the backseat of the taxi. Slowly she struggled awake and climbed out. She blinked her sleepy eyes at the building before her. Hospital Sergio E. Bernales was painted a pale aqua with accents in a brighter blue. A line of red scallops laced the stucco wall above the arched doorways. We walked up to the wrought-iron gate to find it firmly locked. Visiting hours were over. I wondered if this distant view of Gracie’s birthplace would be enough for her. Disappointed, we stood outside the gate and looked up the driveway at the bright blue walls in the distance. We turned to look at the bare brown hills surrounding the hospital and at the neighborhood from which her birth mother came. I thought about her, a young woman in labor, walking up this drive and into the hospital to give birth to our daughter. I wished that unknown woman could see the beautiful, healthy, happy daughter she had borne, could see her now, nine years later, and know that she was well. We took pictures of our family standing outside the gates of the hospital. I wondered what Gracie would make of this small addition to her story. It was too soon to tell. But in less than two
years, for a fifth grade assignment, Gracie, asked to create ten clues her classmates could use to identify her, would write these words: “I was born in Lima, Peru, in a blue hospital.” The hospital, in all its vivid specificity, now occupied a concrete position in the narrative of Gracie’s arrival in the world.

Of Lucy’s origins we knew much more. Yet we doubted our ability to find any of her relatives. For years, we had sent letters to her mother, care of Ana Maria, the attorney who had handled the adoption. But we had never heard from her and doubted that any of our letters had made it into Maria Chacpa’s hands. We had tried to telephone Ana Maria from the States, but the phone number was no longer in service.

When we arrived in Lima, we learned that Bea had secured Ana Maria’s phone number. Ana Maria sounded delighted to hear from us and met us at the hotel bar on our second night in town. Carol and I were both happy to see her again. She had helped us with each of our adoptions. She hugged our daughters and told us that she now had four girls (she had only one baby in 1989). She referred to them as the four Marias, for each one had Maria in her name. I asked Ana Maria if she was still in contact with Esperanza. “Yes,” she told me. “I still see her sometimes.”

“We would like to try to get in touch with her,” I said. “I think Esperanza may be Lucy’s aunt.”

Ana Maria laughed. “Oh, Esperanza is everybody’s aunt.” During the adoption, the translator told me that many Peruvians call anyone from their village “aunt” or “cousin.” The titles do not necessarily denote biological kinship. But Esperanza was from the same village as Maria Chacpa. She had introduced Maria Chacpa to Ana Maria and had carried the adoption decree back to Huasahuasi and returned with the new birth certificate. Ana Maria agreed to help us make contact. “She doesn’t have a phone, but I know where she lives,” she told us. “If I can’t reach her, I will go to her house.”

We were flying out of Lima the next morning, but we would be back in nine days. If by some chance Esperanza could see us during the afternoon of our final day in Lima, we might be able to learn more about Lucy’s kin. Ana Maria was our only hope.

We flew to Arequipa. Our guide took us to see the three beautiful volcanic mountains that ring the white city and the lush valley that enjoys
three growing seasons. We visited a church with a pair of intricately carved columns made from volcanic stone. He explained that when the conquistadores ordered the Indians to carve columns representing paradise, the Indians carved these representations of the paradise on earth where they already lived. So the Catholic church has columns carved from the beautiful white volcanic stone of Arequipa to reveal the jaguar, various native plants and birds, and the face of an Indian god. This, it seemed to me, was another way to interpret the proclamation of John the Baptist and Jesus that “the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” The Incan stonemasons were theologians. “Paradise is all around you,” their columns proclaimed. “Oh taste and see.”

After a couple of days in Arequipa, we flew on to Cuzco. As the bus carried us from the airport to our hotel, we began to notice rainbow flags flying all around the city. At the hotel, we drank coca tea to help us with the altitude and rested in our rooms before meeting our group for lunch. On our way to the town square, we again saw several rainbow flags. “Why do they have rainbow flags all over this town?” Lucy wanted to know. “Are there a lot of gay people in Cuzco?”

“I don’t know,” I said, “but I’ll find out.”

We asked the guide. She explained that this was the Quechua flag and also the Cuzco flag. Lucy, Quechua herself, smiled with delight at this answer. “Now I get it,” she said. “The rainbow flag is the gay flag, and it’s the Quechua flag. You see how everything in our family fits together?” We did see. We bought a giant Quechua flag that we could unfurl from our front porch in celebration of a whole wealth of connections.

Everywhere we traveled, the Peruvians we met welcomed these children who had come to learn about the country of their birth. In the Sacred Valley, we visited a pottery shop where the artist worked with his wife and a large group of employees to make pottery and ceramic art using traditional methods. One large piece hanging in the courtyard depicted a Peruvian woman flying through the air. There was an ethereal beauty to the Sacred Valley that made the idea of a woman in flight seem entirely plausible. In a way, during those magical days of our visit, I felt as if I were in flight myself.

As she always does when she comes to a beautiful place, Carol turned
to me and said, “Let’s retire here. Let’s buy a place in this valley and come back here to live when we retire.”

“OK,” I said, “let’s do.”

A realist from our group interrupted this daydream to caution that if we stayed out of the country for more than six months a year we would lose our Medicare benefits. But we were not making real plans. We were just imagining ourselves in this glorious place, immigrants to the country of our children’s birth, continually happy and always on vacation.

At Machu Picchu, our Quechua guide told the children, “I think of this beautiful place as my house because my ancestors built it.”

“Theyir ancestors built it, too,” one of the mothers reminded her. “These children are all Quechua, just like you. These two,” she said, placing her hands on the shoulders of her own daughters, “were born near here, in Cuzco.”

After the guide had walked us through some of the breathtaking ruins that comprise this spectacular archaeological site crouched between magnificent peaks at the edge of the jungle, she brought us into a gorgeous open field in the midst of Machu Picchu. She asked the children to form a circle, pulled a bag of coca leaves from her pocket, and gave one to each child. She led a ritual of thanks. The children chorused thanks to their parents for bringing them to Peru and to Machu Picchu for letting them visit. They acknowledged the sacred power of the space and promised to return. They offered their coca leaves up by placing them together in a scarf and leaving them in a corner of the field. “If this were a real Quechua ritual,” the guide explained, “it would last for two hours, and at the end we would burn the coca leaves. But we are not allowed to set fires at Machu Picchu now, and I do not think you want me to give you a ritual that lasts two hours.” She was right. But the children entered with wide-eyed reverence into her pared-down ritual.

The night before we flew back to Lima, I called Ana Maria. I had tried not to expect much, but now I learned that Esperanza was planning to meet us at our hotel the next day at two o’clock. Esperanza remembered Lucy. “Ay, Maricruz,” she said with delight when Ana Maria reached her. We told Lucy she might get to meet someone related to her birth mother, someone who had known her as a baby. She was thrilled. We
joined our group for a night of wonderful food and dancing. Live bands and folkloric dancers entertained us while we ate. Our translator, the beautiful Elizabeth, who had been with us throughout our trip, was joined at the restaurant by a handsome young man. He and Elizabeth took to the dance floor, swinging their hips with an ease and freedom that looked to me like a variation on flight. The children laughed and clapped. Then Elizabeth and her gallant companion reached their hands out and led the children onto the floor to join in the revels.

Back in Lima the next day, the children went to visit a school. Lucy and Gracie visited classrooms and talked to the children in both English and Spanish. Lucy was invited to help teach the English portion of the class and was proud to do so. She happily reported to me that her class at Inter-American was much farther along in English than the Lima class. She thought she had been a big help to the Peruvian students.

That afternoon Esperanza and her sister arrived promptly at two. We greeted one another with hugs, like family. The two sisters sat with Lucy and Gracie, touching and hugging and exclaiming over them. With the help of Elizabeth, we learned that Esperanza and her sister were cousins of Maria Chacpa.

Each of them had placed daughters for adoption. With no information about what had become of their children, they longed to know that they were well. They told us about the girls they had surrendered and their worries about how they were doing. It was evident that they hungered for contact with those children and that, for them, this visit offered hope that their girls, too, had found homes where they were happy and well loved.

As they described their own adoption experiences, I began to see how it was that “Esperanza is everybody’s aunt.” Several women from their family and village had surrendered children for adoption. They told us that Lucy had cousins who had been adopted. For a few minutes, they wondered aloud whether Gracie could be the daughter of a woman they knew. But as we compared details of Gracie’s story and the story they recalled it became clear that she was not their friend’s daughter.

Both Esperanza and her sister looked like family. Like Maria Chacpa and Lucy, they were short, less than five feet tall, with stocky bodies and long torsos. They had round faces like Lucy’s and thick, shiny, black
hair. Anyone would be proud to claim kin with these two, they were so kind and welcoming. They hugged both girls, just as you would expect long-lost aunts or cousins to do. Lucy grinned broadly as she sat between them encircled in a warm embrace. On our next visit, they told us, we must plan to stay with them, not in a hotel. Next time they would gather other family members together and see if Lucy’s birth mother could come to town. Next time we would have a party. We wondered what they made of our two-mom family, but if they found anything unusual about it they gave no sign.

Lucy’s birth mother had married, they told us, and given birth to three more children, two girls and a boy. She lived with her husband in Huasahuasi. They had little money and struggled to take care of their family. Her first son, born before Lucy, did not live with Maria Chacpa but with one of his grandparents. That last piece of information answered a question that had long troubled Lucy: Why had her mother kept her brother and not her? Now we had an answer that suggested her mother had not been able to keep either of the children she bore before she married.

As the adoptive parents participated in these various reunions, we did so with a mix of emotions. Uncertainty about how the visit would go made us anxious. We longed for our children to have good, meaningful, healing reunion experiences. We also wanted to know that in the end we, the parents who cared for them each day, would not be replaced. As the various reunions took place, it became clear that the visits were interesting, important, and valuable for the children, but that most of them, after their initial contact with these unfamiliar kin, grew restless. They visited for a while and then were ready to run off and play with their new friends.

Lucy’s response followed this pattern. She enjoyed meeting Esperanza and her sister. She was happy to have some news about her other biological relatives. She participated in the conversation for a while, and then, apparently having heard enough, left the table to play with Gracie and some of the other children from our tour. The meaning the visit had for her would emerge only over time, perhaps years.

Adoption creates whole families out of broken ones. Children who need parents receive parents who want them with their whole hearts, parents who have gone to great lengths to bring these children into their lives. Yet nothing can erase the multiple losses that are woven into the
fabric of adoptive families. Lucy loves all of her family: her adoptive family (Mama-Carol, Mama-Jackie, her sister Gracie, her cats Big Boy and Brenda Starr, and her dog Bonnie) and her biological family (Maria Chacpa, Esperanza, two brothers, two sisters, and all the others who are part of her clan). She would never want to choose among them, for she loves us all, all of the time. I know this is true because when I try to admonish Lucy for some rudeness toward her sister by reminding her that Gracie is the only sister she will ever have she immediately asserts that, as a matter of fact, she has two other sisters and two other brothers. Her older brother, she likes to tell me, is practically perfect. He has never teased or aggravated her, not once.

Esperanza and her sister traveled far and arrived early for their visit with us because, even though she is adopted and living on another continent, Lucy is still family to them. They returned to our hotel once more, on our last day in Peru, bringing one of their daughters with them, a little girl a year younger than Gracie dressed in her school uniform. These women hold Lucy and all of us in their hearts, as they hold not only the children they care for every day but also the ones they relinquished.

We can never love one another enough to make these losses disappear. But I have to hope that by making room for all those loving bonds to survive, and even be cherished, we make the losses more bearable.

On our last two days in Peru, we said good-bye to our friends from the tour group and took a bus south. It was time to visit the Nazca Lines. By midmorning, we were checking into a beautiful resort hotel in Ica, Las Dunas. This was the sort of hotel to which the girls give a four-star rating. It had two large swimming pools, one of which featured a large twisting water slide. Llamas and peacocks wandered the beautifully landscaped grounds. There were tennis courts and shuffleboard courts and horseback riding. As far as Lucy and Gracie were concerned, this was the best hotel of the entire trip. We settled into our room and then met our guide, who took us to the nearby airport for our flight over the Nazca lines.

It was a spectacularly clear day. We climbed aboard the tiny eight-passenger plane and took off from the miniature airport. Even before we reached the Nazca lines, the view was spectacular. The ocean stretched out on our right as we flew south, and the mountains rose up on our left.
Below us was the Pan-American Highway. Lucy sat next to one window, and Gracie sat next to another. We sat beside them and, with our heads touching, peered out at the dry dunes below. After about twenty minutes, the pilot told us the lines were coming into view.

At first, all we could see were geometric shapes. Then we reached the part of the Nazca Plain where the most elaborate figures can be found. For about twenty minutes, we flew past the spider monkey, the condor, the hummingbird, the astronaut, and others. Every drawing could be seen with perfect clarity. Lucy and Gracie were wide-eyed with excitement and delight. Lucy grabbed the camera and began snapping pictures, unwilling to trust a moment this important to my limited photographic skills.

Why did the people of the Nazca Plain labor at such cost in time and effort to create these marvelous, giant drawings most clearly visible from the air? How did they even imagine aerial views of their world? Perhaps they were marking the seasons; perhaps they were preparing messages for airborne beings from another planet, celebrating sacred forms of life, knitting together the planets and the stars, or connecting people and animals and the heavens in the larger circle of life.

I could not know. But I knew this. Two little girls, who, for all we knew, might be descended from some of those same artists and laborers, were sailing through the sky, peering down in awe and wonder, weaving together their North and South American worlds in a complex pattern of their own making. Surely creating this family with Carol, living this moment with our precious girls, flying above the Nazca Plain on this perfect day, surely this was calling enough for a lifetime.