

Peti's Tour : Villa 31

Photo-Essay



Jessica, Facundo and Peti

10 de Julio

I want so much for Peti to trust me. Until now, nothing about the informal settlements of Buenos Aires has made any emotional sense to me. I understand, as much as one can, the political and economic factors that create class systems, inequality and poverty. Yet, none of these can satisfy me emotionally as a reason to my question “why? I have come to talk to Peti about this dubious “why,” and about what it’s like to live here, but this vague and interested line of questioning makes no sense to her. I imagine that she sees me as some oddly quiet foreign journalist, watching her, sitting at her table, and judging her... I feel like she’s used to having direct questions asked, and supplying answers.

Peti's tour was given to me in August 1999, a tour of Villa 31, a squatter settlement in the center of Buenos Aires, Argentina. I photographed with Peti and her daughter, Jessica, and a neighbor's child, Facundo. Though Peti's tour existed in the physicality of Villa 31, her stories were far more wide reaching about the history of movement and change in Argentina, through her explanation of her family photographs. Peti's *barrio* sits behind a main railway station in Buenos Aires and runs for a mile along its tracks. The settlement is about thirty years old and was originally built for temporary resettlement housing.

Peti and her family came from one of the provinces of Argentina to find work in Buenos Aires. She explained how immigration works in Argentina and that the newest immigrants to Buenos Aires, mostly Bolivians and Paraguayans, end up living in rented rooms built on top of squatters' shacks.

The photo essay and personal narrative that this project became was published in *disClosure : a Journal of Social Theory* in 2002. Above, are an image from that essay and excerpt from my journal that is part of the essay.