



# **Our House in the Clouds: Building a Second Life in the Andes of Ecuador (Louann Atkins Temple Women & Culture)**

*Judy Blankenship*

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While many baby boomers are downsizing to a simpler retirement lifestyle, photographer and writer Judy Blankenship and her husband Michael Jenkins took a more challenging leap in deciding to build a house on the side of a mountain in southern Ecuador. They now live half the year in Cañar, an indigenous community they came to know in the early nineties when Blankenship taught photography there. They are the only *extranjeros* (outsiders) in this homely, chilly town at 10,100 feet, where every afternoon a spectacular mass of clouds rolls up from the river valley below and envelopes the town.

In this absorbing memoir, Blankenship tells the interwoven stories of building their house in the clouds and strengthening their ties to the community. Although she and Michael had spent considerable time in Cañar before deciding to move there, they still had much to learn about local customs as they navigated the process of building a house with traditional materials using a local architect and craftspeople. Likewise, fulfilling their obligations as neighbors in a community based on reciprocity presented its own challenges and rewards. Blankenship writes vividly of the rituals of births, baptisms, marriages, festival days, and deaths that counterpoint her and Michael's solitary pursuits of reading, writing, listening to opera, playing chess, and cooking. Their story will appeal to anyone contemplating a second life, as well as those seeking a deeper understanding of daily life in the developing world.

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