What It Takes To Get There
Patricia Webster
President, Amazon Promise

‘Getting there’ has so many different meanings for us at Amazon Promise.

The logistics of putting together a medical expedition, and keeping it running as smoothly as possible in the unpredictable environment that is the Amazon, are never easy. Regardless of the fact that I have been organizing these expeditions for over 16 years, each trip brings new experiences, and new challenges. Take, for example, last year’s looting and the destruction of all of our medical supplies, equipment and medicines. This was not only challenging, but frightening. Then there was the medical ship that we rented to house our team of 33 people on the summer 2008 expedition. The phone call came one week before the team arrived…the ship had a hole and could not sail safely. The last year had its rough spots, but we dealt with each situation and were determined to make sure that clinics went on as scheduled. By the year’s end, we had provided medical care for over 4600 patients.

I am happy to say this year has been no less exciting. Amazon Promise is recognized for our unwavering commitment to work in areas that other NGOs and the Ministry of Health do not reach. We often take extreme measures to travel to the more inaccessible regions of the Amazon to provide much-needed healthcare. This could mean anything from a wild ride (often pushing) in a motorcar (an improvised three-wheeled motorcycle with an awning), along muddy dirt roads to reach makeshift neighborhoods in the port area of Masusa,
to a helicopter flying us over the Andes, dropping off the entire medical team on a remote tributary to set up our clinics.

In February of this year we travelled by helicopter to one of the most remote tributaries in the Amazon to reach Awajun Indigenous communities to provide medical care and distribute insecticide treated mosquito nets. This is a high jungle area with beautiful waterfalls, rocky bottom rivers, giant boulders, and to our surprise…rapids. The first time we visited this area the current ran fast, but there were no rapids. A severe downpour the second night out however, turned the beautiful Yurapaga tributary into a raging river.

Moving 17 people and 2 tons of equipment (including 2000 mosquito nets) on any river is challenging, but when the moving is via small wooden dugout canoes and one very leaky aluminium boat your best bet is to not think too much and just get in the boat to get to the next village. There is no waiting for a day to see if things calm down. If the team doesn’t reach the mouth of the river in 4 days, they will miss the helicopter pickup.

In all of these situations, we were fortunate to have a very experienced and organized staff, and adaptable volunteers that just went with the flow no matter what happened. It is everyone working together that makes each day successful out in the jungle, allowing us to fulfil our promise to provide consistent medical care to the poorest in Peru.

Thanks to your support, each year we are growing and adding new programs and health services. Often, the extra services we provide other than basic medical care depend on who our volunteers are and what they can offer to enhance patient care. The Soy Capaz HIV education and testing program and dental hygiene talks continue on in every clinic we hold, and we continue to reach new areas (http://somethingsstirring.blogspot.com/). We have started working with a local dentist in
Iquitos who recently joined our July/August medical team to work with British dental students from Newcastle. His name is Dr. Rusbcel Revatta Luna and we hope to welcome him as a regular member of our teams in the future in order to provide continuous dental care in each village. We are in the process of trying to obtain funding to acquire a portable dental chair so we can offer more to our patients than simple extractions.

Awajun kids having a blast with a new toy

To learn more about joining an Amazon Promise Medical Team, please email expeditions@amazonpromise.org. Both medical and non-medical volunteers are needed!
Patients seen in 2008

Last year, Amazon Promise served more than 4,000 patients. In addition to over 4,300 medical patients, we saw 486 dental patients. The accompanying table shows the number of patients seen at each of the villages we served. Those of you who volunteered with Amazon Promise last year no doubt remember the joy of compiling our statistics at the end of a long day in clinic! Well, we thought you might enjoy the overview of the entire year’s work, which should provide you with the opportunity to reminisce a bit about your invaluable service with us in Peru. All told, we saw 612 men age 15 and higher; 1,645 women age 15 and higher; 433 boys age 6-14; 557 girls age 6-14; 700 boys age 0-5; and 617 girls age 0-5. If this breakdown doesn’t ring a bell... then you’ve been away too long and should join us again for another trip!!! Thanks to all of our volunteers for a very productive year. Our patient numbers for 2009 are already exceeding last year’s numbers. It’s possible because every time we think there’s no way we could have seen more patients during the longest of the long days, we do it.

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>Nuevo Punchana</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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At the end of October 2008 I joined a team of volunteer doctors on a two-week medical expedition into the Peruvian Amazon. I went to document the journey in video and stills to tell the story of this NGO as they bring much needed medical attention to very remote areas of the Peruvian Amazon. We traveled from village to village along the Pastaza River near the border with Ecuador, attending both indigenous Achuar and mestizo communities. I was able to assist the doctors keep a terribly ill and malnourished 9-month old child alive, I washed terribly infected wounds and I dispensed endless amounts of medication. It was sad, inspiring, motivating, energizing and tiring at the same time. In the end it was an incredible perspective on my own life.

After flying into Iquitos, Peru we boarded the plane that brings workers to Andoas, the oil base near the border with Ecuador. Our supplies would live there while we traveled to remote villages for days at a time, returning to restock. The two wooden boats we used were loaded down with medicine, volunteer foreign doctors, local doctors, a cook, and a boat driver. We also had an indispensable team of people who not only loaded and unloaded the boats, they translated, helped navigate the difficult river, packed and unpacked all the boxes of medicine and tools, as well as organized the patients. This was my sixth journey into the Amazon. The first one was aboard the Calypso when my grandfather was filming in the early 80’s. The next four expeditions were in 2006 and 2007 while filming the documentary Return to the Amazon (http://web.mac.com/oceanfutures/OFS_Amazon/Home.html) with my father and brother for PBS. The most current trip was different in that I was not part of a production team as I usually am, but rather surrounded by doctors.

I am used to playing various roles on my usual expeditions- second photographer, presenter, and field producer. This new plan posed quite the challenge in that I was carrying not only all my still camera gear as usual, but I also had a video camera in hand and audio equipment in my pack. My responsibilities were to help on the medical side of the journey, providing support in both wound care and dispensing medications in the pharmacy, so my usual gear took a backseat.

Though my camera is usually around my neck, on this journey I found it was often by my side as I would wash an infected wound, clean a fungal skin ailment, or shampoo a child’s lice infested hair. Working at the pharmacy table, dozens of people stared at me and waited to be given the pills that would offer relief from parasites, chronic headaches, diarrhea, urinary tract infections, pneumonia, bronchitis, and a plethora of other ailments. Somehow I managed to carry all these roles.

It is an extremely gratifying thing to be able to give much needed medical attention to such remote and disadvantaged places. To give relief to even one person is something so direct and the feeling associated with this act is so immediate. Much more help is needed as we were the only attention these people had received in their villages in years.

I was surprised to see that PlusPetrol, the oil company now operating in the area, helps the local villages through their clinic on the base and has been offering assistance to non-profits such as Amazon Promise with logistical support, plane tickets to get to the base in Andoas, a staging area for all the supplies, and in our case provided a helicopter to get us to the furthest location more efficiently. The previous company, Occidental, had been dumping the toxic waste water from their oil extraction directly into the rivers. When they left the area, they left all the problems as well. PlusPetrol

continued on next page
has been re-outfitting all the wells to re-inject the waste water back from where they got it. This is a sign to me that with enough pressure from the outside, we can make change happen! It is our responsibility to see to this.

I did not go there thinking I would have any empathy for the oil company, but I did come back understanding more. No matter what point of view we have, no matter what opinions we hold, more information is always better. I really started thinking about who is at fault here. Aren’t we all really? Is it not us, the consumers of this oil that are at the root of this issue with our daily requirements for a dose of black gold? We pump it into our cars, dab on petroleum based products, use our plastics, and if you look close enough, oil byproducts are everywhere we are. So we are totally right to demand better practices from the oil companies, but we must also demand the same from ourselves.

It was easier for me to adjust to going to the Amazon and be part of the medical team than it was to come home. It took at least a week to adjust back to this world where my phone rings, my computer beckons, emails await, and the clinic is just down the street if I need it. I was on a small boat with the team going from one village to another with our medical supplies when someone on the boat said- “Oh by the way, congratulations on Obama.” It was Nov 5, obviously he found a radio in one of the villages. I looked around at the vast expanse of green jungle, sweat dripping from all my pores in the midday heat. I thought of the 9-month old girl we attended, malnourished, weighing under 11 pounds (5 kg), with 103.8 fever and pneumonia. Her nail beds were blue, her body was limp, and she could not breast feed because she could not breathe. If we had arrived 2 days later, she would have died. Of course I was happy Obama was going to be the new president, but in that moment, I was immersed in a very real and tangible experience- saving one little life. When I got back home, I was asked if it felt good to be back to reality. I had not anticipated my answer- I feel like that was reality.

Please go to www.youtube.com/amazonpromise to view Celine’s beautiful short film about Amazon Promise’s work in remote indigenous communties
Amazon Promise Facilities Update

By Kristina Server

Over the last year, Amazon Promise has continued to lay the groundwork for the Promesa de Belén medical clinic. Now with title to the land, Amazon Promise has had the continued privilege of working with the New York City Professional Chapter of Engineers Without Borders on a final clinic design. The clinic will provide Amazon Promise with a continuous presence in the region, serve thousands of patients in the slum area of Belén, and offer health education – from classes on traditional medicine to training Promoters of Health from local villages – on a constant basis.

Amazon Promise is currently seeking the necessary resources to build the clinic; for those of you who have contributed, we thank you! Amazon Promise is one step closer to making this clinic a reality and ensuring a sustainable source of health for thousands in need.

The community in Belén, otherwise known as Sector 10, is anxious to see the clinic become a reality. Amazon Promise’s Patty Webster and Javier Villanes have been continually working with community leaders to share Amazon Promise’s plans and anticipated timeline. In fact, on August 7th, Amazon Promise participated in a community meeting in Belén and addressed people’s concerns; health care can’t come quickly enough to the families and children in Belén.

To that end, Amazon Promise will be constructing a pre-clinic in Sector 10 in September, 2009. Thanks to the generous support of Girls on Top and other supporters, Amazon Promise purchased a small house on nearby land that will function as a temporary clinic facility until the main clinic is built. (While Amazon Promise holds title to a larger piece of land, as referenced above, this land currently serves as the community’s soccer field and recreation space.) It will take a few weeks to construct, and, once operational, the pre-clinic will offer regular Saturday clinics for patients suffering from chronic health conditions, parasites and other diarrheal illnesses, anemia, and dehydration, among others. We are thrilled to be able to jump start our consistent presence in the community.

The Amazon Promise Iquitos office also continues to serve the community 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. No one is turned away, and patients arrive from afar to request our assistance. As many of our supporters and alumni are aware, Amazon Promise also rents a large warehouse space beneath the Iquitos headquarters. Amazon Promise is seeking funding to purchase this space and transform it into a training facility for Promoters of Health and Traditional Midwives. The space will house Promoters from throughout the state of Loreto, and offer courses that compliment the educational activities taking place at the Promesa de Belén medical clinic. This facility will also provide housing for patients (especially pregnant women) who come from the jungle seeking medical care and have nowhere to stay.

We look forward to keeping our supporters and alumni apprised of our work. For more information on how you can help Amazon Promise, please contact Kristina@amazonpromise.org or visit www.amazonpromise.org.
Amazon Promise Receives Grant for Insecticide Treated Mosquito Nets!

In June of this year, Amazon Promise received a generous grant of $15,000 from The CHEST Foundation via Amazon Promise alumni Dr. Stephen Winter to purchase and distribute 20,000 insecticide treated mosquito nets to remote indigenous communities throughout the Peruvian Amazon. Amazon Promise is honored to have been one of only six recipients worldwide of The CHEST 2009 D. Robert McCaffree, MD, Master FCCP Humanitarian Awards. This new grant will allow Amazon Promise to continue to deliver vital insecticide treated mosquito nets to patients in need, protecting families from malaria- and dengue-carrying mosquitoes, snakes, and bats, among other dangers.

Amazon Promise first launched its efforts to distribute insecticide treated mosquito nets in February of 2009 after a donation of 2,000 insecticide-treated nets by Against Malaria (the first award of insecticide treated mosquito nets made in South America by this U.K.-based organization) and support from Amazon Promise’s generous donors. The delivery team consisted of 18 people and 900 kilos of insecticide treated mosquito nets. In addition to holding medical clinics in multiple communities and seeing over 800 patients, these insecticide treated mosquito nets were distributed to every family in the remote Awajun (Aguarunas) Indian villages of Napuruka, Sachapapa, Atahualpa, Ajachin, Chapis, Nuevo Alegria, and 23 other Awajun villages.
A Few Thoughts from Medical Director, Dr. Robert Hyzy

“Excellent opportunity, great benefits,” is how AP President Patty Webster approached me with the offer that I become the Medical Director of Amazon Promise in May of last year. I was surprised by the proposition, as I had only begun working with the organization a short time prior. However, in that time I had made my initial trip to Peru to work with AP in Iquitos, facilitated the application of AP to procure anti-malarial bed nets from Against Malaria in the U.K., organized a presentation by Patty at the University of Michigan Medical School where I work, and scheduled the first ever University of Michigan Global Reach trip with U of M Med Students for that Fall. I accepted.

Although over 60 of our class of 170 students at the University of Michigan Medical School take an abroad rotation during their fourth year, I was pleased to create the AP rotation as the only home grown opportunity for our students to do service work abroad in their final year before getting their degrees. Our first U of M trip in September of last year to Iquitos and the Yarapa River region with five students was a great success. Although I had not organized or been responsible for such a rotation previously, Irene Tseng, Beth Belloli, Aazaa Haq, Laura Montague, and Sarah Singelton had taken leap of faith by their trust in me, like jumping off the dock at the Yacumama Lodge into the murky brown water of the Yarapa River. Which we did. Often. The success of our trip was determined by the students’ outstanding ability to take my advice: “always do what Patty tells you to do!”

Last December found me in Newburyport, Massachusetts, at the home of AP volunteer coordinator, Jackie Carroll, for my first board meeting. Jackie had become a close friend during my first two trips. Admittedly, she had to listen to me whine about my concerns as to whether a Pulmonary and Critical Care doc had anything useful to offer in Loreto (first trip) and to whether our students were having a successful rotation (second trip). But I digress. As the newest, and first male member of the AP Board I was warmly welcomed into an inner circle whom had known each other for many years through multiple adventures together in Peru. They made me feel like one of them . . . right down to the welcoming gift of finely scented bath oils and soap! My wife Julie was greatly amused by this and now believes there is a god. Between glasses of wine we planned for the future of AP. As AP was awarded 2,000 bed nets by Against Malaria in July, I was anxious to see the project through to completion. Consequently I returned to Peru in February of this year for a two-week remote jungle trip to the Upper Marañon River region. Along the way, three friends and colleagues of mine had decided to join the trip: Molly Horstman, a fourth year student, with whom I had worked and a seasoned international medical volunteer; Dr. Steven Winter, head of the Pulmonary Division at Norwalk...
Hospital in Connecticut, who had traveled the world providing medical relief as a board member of Americares; and Dr. Anoop Nambiar, a Fellow in my Pulmonary Division at the University of Michigan, who . . . wait for it . . . had become fascinated with Bear Grylls of “Man vs. Wild,” on the Discovery Channel.

Instead of “Planes, Trains and Automobiles,” our logistically fungible trip, aka “Plan B,” was a true adventure of “Buses, Helicopters and (at times leaky) Boats.” Dr. Molly Horstman, now an intern at the University of Michigan, hopes to make another AP trip later on in her residency. In addition, my good friend Steve Winter has remained actively engaged with AP and is planning an Amazon Promise trip of Norwalk Hospital physicians to the Pacaya Samaria Reserve from March 7th to April 17th, 2010, and hopes to create an annual rotation. Lastly, “DocNoop” is doing locum tenens in New Zealand and still trying to collect more YouTube hits than me on his posting from the trip.

Which brings me to the present. So far, my time as AP Medical Director has been everything Patty promised: the opportunity to step outside my usual professional life as a university professor to serve those in desperate medical need, and the benefit of working alongside many incredibly dedicated people. February of next year will see the next University of Michigan Global Reach trip. This time we have seven fourth-year medical students and have also secured the

Amazon Promise relies on private support to fund current operations, expand its services, and provide a wider range of care to urban and rural communities in Peru. If you would like to make a gift, please mail your check or money order to: P.O. Box 1304, Newburyport, MA, 01950. Or, click here to give via PayPal. Thank you for your support!
Stephen M. Winter, MD  
Chief, Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine  
Norwalk Hospital  
Clinical Professor of Medicine, Yale University  
Medical Volunteer, February 2009 in remote Awajun villages of the upper Marañon River and its tributaries

It is difficult to identify a single image of the trip to remote Awajun (Aguaruna) villages with Amazon Promise that best represents my memories: lying back in a dugout canoe and watching the quiet flow of the river while the loud birds in the surrounding jungle compete with the put-put of our little outboard motor; the birds skittering low over the wide Maranon river as the sun sets; the wild welcome dances in every village, especially at night when the dancers come right up to your face singing spookily dissonant chants in the darkness; the chaos of the clinics with their constant churning of people and energy; or the times when you can steal some quiet moments and just look at the beauty of everything around you. In the end, I think it is the Awajun people themselves. When we first entered a village, the kids ran away and unsmiling somewhat suspicious faces watched us quietly. By the time we are ready to leave a village after conducting a clinic, the kids were running circles around us, people were laughing and waving, and families we have cared for in the clinic gave us big smiles. The faces of the Awajun are often very beautiful; the young mothers breastfeeding their children tied into a cloth slung over their shoulder, the village elders dressed in traditional outfits with necklaces and toucan feather crowns, the wrinkled faces of the old women and the children. The children are just gorgeous.

The trip was filled with so many amazing memories coupled with a real feeling of accomplishment. Besides conducting clinics in six remote villages, we managed to move 900 kilos of mosquito nets to some of the most isolated places on the planet. Two thousand nets made their way to 1,500 Awajun families in 36 different villages. The logistics of moving a team of fourteen, the supplies and medications to conduct our clinics, all our food and drinking water AND 2000 mosquito nets into the jungle by bus, helicopter and dugout canoe, was mind boggling. You almost have to be crazy to think you can even do something so difficult, but for Amazon Promise this was almost routine. Over twenty years of working in international medical relief in places as difficult as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Congo, Iraq and Darfur, I had never seen a more complicated and difficult operation.

The conditions in the jungle can be demanding. The heat, bugs, snakes, and lack of plumbing felt like a real hardship at first, but almost before the trip is over you know that you have to come back again…it just feels too good. In February, along with another attending, I will be leading a team of six doctors from the Norwalk Hospital/Yale University internal medicine training program. We will spend a week working in Iquitos before heading into the jungle to conduct clinics for another two weeks. This begins what I hope will be a standing relationship between Norwalk Hospital and Amazon Promise with teams from Norwalk and Yale participating in an annual trip with Amazon Promise.
Update on Ismael  
by Patty Webster

In September of 2007, during our first medical intervention in the very remote Awajun village of Napuruka on the upper Marañon River, we met Ismael, a 19 yr. old Awajun man. He was brought into clinic in a wheelbarrow with his lower left leg wrapped up in old dirty rags. You could tell he was frightened by the way his eyes shifted quickly back and forth and he constantly turned his head to look around him. Once he allowed us to take off the wraps on his foot, we were shocked to discover that what was once his foot was now just a stump with jagged bone sticking out from the bottom. (see photo) He had been bitten by a snake several months before, and without access to medical care, was basically sitting in his family’s hut watching the rest of his leg rot before his eyes. You can imagine not only the pain and suffering he felt, but also the psychological trauma he had been experiencing.

We were able to get him evacuated to Lima where he underwent a below the knee amputation, saving his life. From there we had him flown to Iquitos so we could care for him, help him readjust, and eventually be fitted for a prosthetic leg. Many of you graciously donated to Ismael’s cause which allowed us to provide continuous care and purchase his new leg. Unfortunately, he was not able to return to his village for almost a year because of several infections that prevented him from being fitted for the leg! Let’s just say it wasn’t an easy journey.

I’m pleased to announce that Ismael returned to Napuruka walking with his new leg (and a crutch) this past February. We were able to visit with...
him just a couple of weeks after his return during our February medical trip that took us to the same Awajún villages to deliver treated mosquito nets. We met with his family and did our best to alleviate their concerns in caring for Ismael, and explained how best to care for the leg to allow it to last him a long time. We also spent time counseling them on how to cope with the situation. You can imagine that a young man, minus a leg, living out in the jungle trying to keep up with the demands of everyday survival is going to have a difficult time. But it’s up to him now, and we will be checking up on him to ensure he continues to do well.

We would like to thank everyone for your generosity and concern for Ismael’s life.
Sangama Witi Puanch
By Patricia Webster

Over the years Amazon Promise has worked with and trained many village health care workers (promoters of health or POH) and traditional midwives. Typically when we are working in an area, we invite several POH from the villages to travel with us and work side by side with our medical teams, learning on the job. Our goal is to have a training facility where we can train and house large groups of village POH and traditional midwives at a time, creating a more sustainable system of healthcare delivery.

Sangama Witi Puanch is a promoter of health in training from the upper Pastaza River near Ecuador. The remote Achuar native village where Puanch is from has no medical post and is an 8 hour canoe ride from the nearest medical facility. Because we only travel to the Pastaza once a year, it’s difficult to provide continuous training to Puanch. Certainly the need for a well-trained promoter of health is of the utmost importance in such a remote area. Thanks to the assistance of Plus Petrol and their employee air transport, we were able to bring Puanch to Iquitos this past August to travel with our medical team for four weeks. Puanch assisted Amazon Promise doctors, and trained with medical students from England, Ireland and the US. He’ll return to Iquitos again to work with our September medical team providing medical care in villages of the Pacaya Samiria National Reserve. This is a great way for us to continue his training throughout the year.

Puanch practicing taking a blood pressure.

Puanch (second from left) with his father and brothers.
### 2010 Trip Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb 6 – 27 2010</td>
<td>Three Week, University of Michigan Yarapa River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar 27 – Apr 17 2010</td>
<td>Three Week Norwalk Hospital Pacaya Samiria Reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 17 – Aug 14 2010</td>
<td>Four Week Medical Student Trip Yarapa River</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul 24 – Aug 7 2010</td>
<td>Two Week Jungle with above student trip Yarapa River</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep 11 – Sep 25 2010</td>
<td>REMOTE Two week Medical Student Trip Aguarunas or Pastaza (TBA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 16 – Oct 30 2010</td>
<td>Two Week Australian Dental/Medical Team Pacaya Samiria Reserve</td>
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To learn more about joining an Amazon Promise Medical Team, please email expeditions@amazonpromise.org.

To read more about volunteer field experiences, [Click Here!](#)
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