Since 1993, over 550 dedicated volunteers from the US, Canada, Australia and Europe have made their way to Peru to volunteer with Amazon Promise! Many of them have come down two, three, four times, or even more! Some people volunteer every year. AP Alumni Kari Sorg (3rd trip), Elena Deem (2nd trip) and Priti Dave (2nd trip) will all be returning for our upcoming August medical trip. Many of those who are unable to come down physically help us financially or with recruitment and marketing. Our website manager Nich lives in Australia! It is Amazon Promise volunteers that have made the organization successful against all the odds, and volunteers that keep our organization afloat! (Pun intended!)

We’re gearing up for a full summer and fall schedule with four back-to-back medical interventions starting at the end of July. Our month long medical student internship starts July 21st. This trip is very popular and always fills up fast with medical, PA, and nursing students who want an opportunity to learn about global health and health care practices in a developing country. Volunteering with Amazon Promise, they gain invaluable patient care experience unrivaled by medical rotations they may have had previously. This year we’re proud to have three PA students from Yale University, two first year medical students from Albert Einstein College of Medicine, a 4th year medical student from King’s College London School of Medicine, and two pre-med students. Before heading out to the jungle, we will be holding clinics in poor neighborhoods around Iquitos, and visiting a government laboratory where students get a first hand look at malaria, dengue fever, intestinal parasites, leishmaniasis, TB and HIV. Students will also spend a full day with an ethnobotanist learning about medicinal plants, and with a shaman and other traditional healers. The fourth week will be spent in Iquitos holding clinics and visiting local hospitals.

continued on page 2
Beginning on September 15th, a five member research team will be heading to very remote Aguaruna Indian villages of the upper Marañon River to hold clinics, deliver medical supplies, and meet with village leaders to see how we might help them in the future. We won’t be flying out of Iquitos for this trip, but heading up the northern coast of Peru to the city of Piura where we’ll be taken by bus and helicopter to the Petro Peru oil base. From there we’ll travel by boat, truck and helicopter to reach remote villages that never receive medical attention. Amazon Promise alumni Chris Kellner, Claudio Colangelo (see Claudio’s article in this edition), Dr. Chuck Morris and his wife Lynn, and new volunteer Leo Campos will be part of this research team. This entire area of the Upper Marañon River recently became a separate province of Peru called Datem (Ayahuasca in the Aguaruna language). Through our meetings with Agruna leaders we’ve learned so much about this unique indigenous tribe. We’ll have a full report with photos in an upcoming newsletter.

Our first one-week medical trip takes place this October (6th – 13th), and we’re very excited to begin providing more health care services in the city of Iquitos, particularly in the impoverished regions of Belén and Masusa. For those who don’t have the two weeks to spare or don’t want to confront the mosquitoes and mud of the jungle, this trip is a great opportunity to become an Amazon Promise volunteer.

Lastly, our two week November medical expedition has turned into a month-long medical student internship! Five 4th-year British medical students have organized their own group and will arrive November 17th!

In this edition of the Amazon Promise Newsletter, our Alumni Spotlight features Mr. Claudio Colangelo from Rome Italy. Claudio has been a non-medical volunteer with Amazon Promise since 1998. He has been on three trips, and will soon be back with us as part of our research team to Aguaruna villages. He also represents Amazon Promise in Italy, assisting us with fundraising and even procuring two large donations of medicines that were shipped to Peru last year. After his most recent trip with AP in November 2006, he and AP-Peru vice president Javier Villanes, organized a Christmas party for 100 children in Belén. It was a truly spectacular event complete with an MC clown, games, contests, prizes (everyone received a prize), and lunch for all the children and their families. To cap off the day, several piñatas were brought out, sending all of the children and spectators into a frenzy! Claudio knows how to throw a party! More than that, his dedication and friendship have been invaluable to us.

On behalf of all of Amazon Promise and the people of Peru, I’d like to thank you all for your continued support.

Patty Webster
President

Support Amazon Promise!

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!
Volunteer Spotlight

Written By Claudio Colangelo, a three-time non-medical volunteer who is also Amazon Promise’s Italian representative.

I have been asked to write something about my experience with Amazon Promise. At first I hesitated because here we are talking about feelings and, being not an English mother tongue, I felt inappropriate to express soul experiences in a foreign language. But I must avoid being egotistic and share with you my thoughts.

As I tried to put on paper my memories, hundreds of images emerged like corks popping up from the depth of my soul: smiling Achuar kids, heavy rain pouring on my hat, long jungle walks sweating like a pig, blooming flowers, enchanting rivers, multiple rainbows after a storm.

But, to let you better understand, I think I should tell you why I went there the first time and, especially, why I keep going back like one addicted.

I would describe myself a missed pioneer. I easily imagine myself in the XIX century along the Nile Valley digging for Egyptian artifacts or browsing the Amazon following Fitzcarraldo’s footsteps. Nurturing my gypsy soul, in the year 2000 I was browsing the web to find interesting places to visit when I suddenly was attracted by an ad calling for adventure, for an unforgettable experience in the jungle of the Peruvian Amazon. I said, “This may be the chance to experience an Indiana Jones trip, to try the real stuff”, and there I was. I immediately applied for the trip and started to organize for it. I bought a tent able to afford heavy rain, a big backpack, a scout knife, amphibian boots…it looked like I was leaving for the moon…

Then…I arrived in Iquitos where a wonderful girl with big hazelnut green eyes and a shining smile was waiting for me at the airport. That’s a good start, isn’t it? She was Patty, Amazon Promise President and my “Virgilio” in the “hell circle” of the Amazon jungle (you may remember the “Divine Comedy” from Dante…). We spent a couple of days in Iquitos waiting for the boat to be ready for the trip and this gave me the opportunity to discover a world, the world of Belén, Iquitos’ borough. This is a place where people live in real need, with no awareness for hygiene nor, apparently, for respect of human beings but, to my perception, a place where poverty and ignorance are magically transformed into willingness of life.
Welcome New Board Member!

We would like to introduce Kristina Server as the newest member of the Board of Directors. Kristina serves as Amazon Promise's Fundraising and External Affairs Director, overseeing advancement efforts and strategic planning. She works in the non-profit sector and has a background in fundraising, public administration, and public health. Kristina has traveled extensively in Peru and lives in Seattle, Washington. Welcome Kristina! Kristina may be reached by email at kristina@amazonpromise.org.

Volunteer Spotlight, continued from page 3

What a flash. I cannot recall to my mind any other place in the world where the energy of life is bigger.

And finally we left for the jungle. It would be an unusual trip, with no patient attendance but with the purpose of finding more villages in need of medical assistance. We floated for days along huge rivers, experienced camping on sand banks, got soaked by heavy rain, visited villages, talked to village chiefs to introduce Amazon Promise and evaluate willingness for cooperation. With the days passing, the adventure feeling faded and I got more and more in relation with the environment, my eyes melted into the green of the jungle. I was falling in love. The silence in the sunrise broken by the early birds, the pure darkness of the nights, the smell of the jungle, the song of the rivers, the charm of the indigenous took my heart piece by piece.

Unfortunately time is the less available item in life. The trip came to an end too soon for me. It was like a thirsty man drinking fresh water suddenly stopped for some reason. And because of this thirstiness, once back home the desire of getting back there rose up, so when Patty sent me an email inviting people for a trip in the remote area of the Pastaza River, next to the Ecuador border…not even a hesitation. I accepted immediately and the dream started again.

Long days on the rivers, navigating from village to village, clinics to care for sick people, kids playing around us, natives sharing with us their habits, dancing with us, drinking masato with us, playing soccer with us. And again the real darkness of the jungle in the night and the charming murmurs of the forest waking up in the morning. What a dream. I was getting addicted. Addicted to that simplicity of life. Addicted to enjoying little things. Addicted to the pleasure of helping others.

This is the way that my aptitude for adventure turned into a love feeling for the Amazon. I really feel changed. I hope with the little help I can give, I will be able to contribute to alleviate the uneasy life of some of the people in need in the Amazon. Thank you Patty. If you wouldn’t have started this marvelous activity, since the early 90’s, I wouldn’t have had the chance to experience such a dream.

ALUMNI

We want to hear from you! We will be presenting a new section in each newsletter featuring updates from Amazon Promise alumni. Please send us information on where you are now, what you are doing etc. Did you do a medical student rotation and are now a physician? How did your experience with Amazon Promise influence you? Please send you updates – along with any address and email changes – to kristina@amazonpromise.org.
Each time I board my plane in Iquitos heading back to the United States, I am filled with an overwhelming sense of guilt. How can I leave these people behind? Who will still be here when I return? What will happen to the farmer who showed up on our doorstep yesterday with the diabetic foot ulcer and osteomyelitis? Or the severely malnourished baby in Puerto Alegre whose mother drowned in the midst of an epileptic seizure, or the twenty-two year old girl in the village of San Juan with advanced cervical cancer or the fisherman in Belén with the rapidly growing eye tumor? Which of the dozens of babies I cared for during my last trip will live to see his or her first birthday?

Over the last five years there have been hundreds of patients whose stories I have carried with me from Peru back to my “normal” life – my life of privilege, my life as a busy physician assistant in a fully-equipped academic medical center where practicing medicine means following algorithms, ordering multiple radiological tests and soliciting the recommendations of consulting physicians. It is a far cry from jungle medicine, where being a good “Doctora” requires little more than clinical intuition, a pair of hands and a stethoscope. The patients I leave behind haunt and beckon me to return to them; in remote villages in the Upper Amazon Basin, or the impoverished slums of Belén, there is no one else. These are communities, like so many others in the developing world, ravaged by abject poverty and preventable diseases – communities where survival is a very real daily struggle. There is no one else. No wonder I feel guilty for leaving.

Amazon Promise was a dream realized, the diligent work of six people who knew we could improve the lives of those abandoned and forgotten by their own government and an inadequate healthcare system. Promesa de Belén, “The Promise of Belén” is also a dream, yet I have every reason to believe that within the next two years, this 6000 square foot clinic will be built, offering the people of Belén not only consistent and superb medical care, but for the first time in their lives, hope for the future. Likewise, we will be able to provide sustainable healthcare to indigenous populations on the Huasaga and Pastaza River regions, not just by visiting these villages ourselves two or three times a year, but by bringing Health Promoters from these villages to Belén and giving them the formal training and education that will allow them to care for their communities in the absence of visiting medical teams.

My commitment to building Amazon Promise grew out of both selflessness and selfishness, of a need to do more and be more, and a gnawing desire to continuously challenge myself to grow beyond all the things that were handed to me simply by virtue of being born in this country. I knew early on in my medical career that a routine practice would never be enough for me. My ten years as a practicing PA in two academic medical centers has only helped to foster that desire to contribute my knowledge, experience and energy in places where showing up for work each day means bringing relief and hope to the lines of people spilling out the make-shift clinic door, wrapping around stilted huts, smoldering fires, emaciated dogs, and the village soccer field, the epicenter of this very small universe.
Trip Report April: May 2007 Expedition

By Cheryle Ramirez

Once again this April, I joined international volunteers in Iquitos to provide medical and health education services for the people of the upper Amazon Basin in Peru. Each trip is similar but unique. We had a great group of volunteers – four nurses, three from the US and one from the UK; two doctors from the US, one an emergency medicine physician, and the other, a naturopathic physician (a first for us). Two non-medical volunteers also joined us: one being my husband and the other my uncle. My husband worked in patient registration and my uncle, who is fluent in Spanish, worked with HIV education and helped translate for other volunteers and the pharmacy. We were also joined by a Peruvian physician, Dr. Alex. The team connected almost immediately, and by our first clinic in Puerto Miguel things were running smoother then ever for a first clinic. Below, please find trip reports from two of our volunteers – non-medical volunteer, Joe Ramirez, and naturopathic physician, Dr. Andrew Lustig.

Joe Ramirez, non-medical volunteer

When I volunteered to participate in the April 2007 trip with Amazon Promise, I did so with the expectation that not only would I have an opportunity to experience the Amazon forest but also I would be able to do something worthwhile for the people living there. I have to admit, the trip fulfilled all expectations - and then some. I found myself participating with a wonderful group of dedicated doctors, nurses, volunteers and other workers that made this trip an extraordinary experience.

I expected to work with the non-Spanish speaking medical people as a translator. Well, yes, I did do that but I was also put in charge of the “Soy Capaz” lectures. “Soy Capaz” is an Amazon Promise program of HIV/AIDS prevention, education, and care in the Amazon area of Peru. AIDS has been steadily progressing here where Amazon Promise operates. Cases of infection are increasing at alarming rates. The villages in the Amazon Delta will soon find themselves on the receiving end of the HIV epidemic. The village and town populations have little knowledge about the nature of the disease, how it spreads, or preventive measures that should be followed. The “Soy Capaz” lecture follows an uncomplicated flip chart giving the basic information on the disease and stresses preventive measures such as the use of condoms, the danger of sharing needles, etc.

As the people of each village gathered to see the doctors, I set up my presentation with the help of my trusty assistant, Ricky, a young man from a local village. Ricky handled the flip chart while I did my “shtick”. I went over what the disease is, its causes and ways to prevent getting it. I also demonstrated the correct use of a condom using a prop - the dried branch of the Capinuri tree which has an uncanny resemblance to an erect male member of a very generous size. Following our presentation, Ricky and I passed out condoms to all those who wanted them. Unfortunately, we ran out of condoms before our last clinic in the town of Belen. We had given out 1,000. The people of the villages are obviously concerned and do respond to our efforts.

My hope is that I will be able to have another “adventure” with Amazon Promise.
Dr. Andrew Lustig, naturopathic physician

...My experience in the jungle was absolutely great! I worked in conjunction with the Shaman, Don Humberto; the Peruvian doctor, Alex; and my friend, Greg. It was amazing that Amazon Promise was supplying these villagers with Traditional medicine, Homeopathic medicine, and Western medicine – three different medical modalities! This might be unprecedented in the jungle and maybe very few other places, for that matter! Each of us passed patients back and forth, as needed, realizing that with three different types of medical treatments, we had skills and products that would benefit the villagers in so many different ways! In addition to the four doctors, we had wonderful nurses and translators. What an absolute luxury to have one translator and one nurse for each doctor...

We also had a great group of other folks helping with meals, STD/HIV education, pharmacy, registration, etc.

All in all, we treated probably 600-700 villagers in 8 different remote village locations. The people were exceptionally grateful and really beautiful heartfelt individuals. They came to us with parasites, diarrhea, flu and colds, headaches, a dislocated shoulder, emotional problems, work related eye, muscle and joint pain, female issues, etc.

Everyone back in the States asks if I would do it again. The answer is yes, absolutely, I just need to pick a date!
NEW!!! One-Week Volunteer Opportunities

One-week trips have just been added!

Many have expressed an interest in coming to Peru to volunteer in Amazon Promise clinics but either can’t get away for two weeks, or don’t necessarily want to trek through the muddy jungle and fight mosquitoes to do it. We understand that! Demand for our medical care services is overwhelming especially right here in the city of Iquitos where we often see people in conditions far worse than those in the jungle. We want to reach as many people as possible and, with your help, we can.

We’re pleased to announce the addition of our first One-Week Trip that will run Oct. 6 -13. Full-day medical clinics will run throughout the week in the poorest sections of Iquitos in the floating city of Belen, and the port area of Masusa. We’ll be able to give desperately needed medical care to hundreds of people living in extreme poverty.

Upcoming Trip dates

2007
October 6 - 13, 2007
One week expedition in the city of Iquitos and the port area of Masusa.
November 17 - December 1, 2007
Two week jungle expedition. Location to be announced.

2008
February 9 – 23, 2008
Two-week jungle expedition. Location to be announced.
March 1 – 8, 2008 (tentative)
One-week expedition in the city of Iquitos and the port area of Masusa.
March 15 – 22, 2008
One-week expedition in the city of Iquitos and the port area of Masusa.
July 12 – August 9, 2008
Four-Week Healthcare Internship in Iquitos and jungle areas.
July 19 – August 2, 2008
Two-week jungle expedition (coincides with the four-week medical student healthcare internship). Location to be announced.
September 6 – October 4, 2008
Four-Week Healthcare Internship in Iquitos and jungle areas.
September 13 – 27, 2008
Two-week jungle expedition (coincides with the four-week medical student healthcare internship). Location to be announced.
October 11 – 18, 2008
One-week expedition in the city of Iquitos and the port area of Masusa.
October 25 – November 8, 2008
Two-week jungle expedition. Location to be announced.

To learn more about Amazon Promise expeditions, please email expeditions@amazonpromise.org. Both medical and non-medical volunteers are needed!
Amazon Promise is a U.S. non-profit organization, exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Under state law, which will vary from state to state, and federal law, which may change annually, a large portion, if not all of your trip is tax deductible in the United States. Likewise, monetary donations made in the U.S. are tax deductible.