After a deafening snake ride on the Chicago subway, three flailing flights in the air, and cutting through the vines of customs, I finally left the concrete jungles behind and stepped into one of the "Eden's of the world." I am finally on the last flight that roars into Iquitos.

One of the great things about flying into Peru is that they open the front and back doors of the plane, which not only enables a quicker exit, but also sends a rush of fresh air to the lungs. I walked across the tarmac, looking up at the vultures, which had caused my flight to be cancelled the day before. Patty greeted me at the airport and I could feel a new episode of "doc tari" coming on. I knew I was moments away from darting motos (three wheeled motor taxis) and balancing in dugout canoes.

The wondrous smells of fresh cooking flowed down the street and permeated the clothes of this well-traveled bloke. Patty did a quick rundown on who was there and last-minute changes to the trip. The town was full of people due to the junior World Cup championships.

Evening fell upon us as the team gathered in an atmosphere befitting a last supper. Sitting on my right side was Bracey. He was one of two filmmakers to document our funniest moments. He also would create some. John, the other man behind the camera, would later be dinner for chiggers, those nasty bugs that get under your skin. I ran my eyes up and down the menu, selected my prey and waited for it to be placed before me. I'd been waiting for this delicious cuisine since my last trip.

My plate arrived and I no sooner begin drifting away with delicious ecstasy than Patty brought me back to reality exclaiming, "What is that?!" "That" was not my food she was talking about. Bracey exclaimed from the right, "Is it GODZILLA?" I pondered if it was a big truck passing behind us. Patty on my left interjected "No, it's an earthquake!" (A 7.5, we would find out later.) We sat dumbfounded for a moment. Everyone in Peru knows to run out but we all kind of thought the shaking was going to stop. It didn't. Seeing the kitchen staff run by in front of us convinced us our table of 12 should head for the door, too. Dr. Juan Carlos begrudgingly ran out, I think, only to support his wife, Yolanda. The doctor looked as if his food was coming next
and didn't want an earthquake to interrupt it.

The shaking stopped and we went back and finished our food. Patty ran back to check her house. Fireworks were shot off at the river's edge to bring the soccer championship to a close and an end to our eventful night.

The next morning we herded into a van to the airport where we split into two groups. Group one would leave immediately on a bus to Nauta and transfer to a speedboat up river. Group two, including myself, would be flying on a Plus Petrol flight. Plus Petrol is the big oil company in the jungle. The tight quarters on these flights is a challenge to the claustrophobic, including myself. The tight quarters fade away when you peer down on the forest canopy and the river reflects back up at you. The silvery lattice of the river mesmerizes your mind and you stop thinking about how your knees are cramped into the chair in front of you.

A light touch from the earth and we were back on the ground. At the end of the runway we had to go through the same lectures the oil workers get before being discharged. These are actually interesting, especially if you don't know Spanish well. I know enough to misinterpret a formal conversation and make it funny. The oil base is on one side of the river and the village of Trompeteros is on the other. It had been a couple years since I'd been here. Back then my fault was trusting a floatplane to fly; they're much better at just floating. Last time we were too heavy to become airborne and after three scary attempts, I was more than happy to take a boat.

On these trips there are often "waiting times." One never really knows how long they are or even what we are waiting for sometimes. This time we were "waiting" for the oil company to give the O.K. to get our cargo. Oh, yes, of course we were also waiting for group one to arrive, hopefully today. We had a great privilege of being joined by the Peruvian Ministry of Health this time. But they were "waiting" to be rescued. Their boat ran aground or ran out of gas or ran out. Patty sent our boat down to help them.

The group that left with us took some relaxing time under the gazebo in the new main square. On the borders of the square under the blistering sun we could see slight activities. Dr. Juan Carlos searching for extra petrol from the medical post; Segundo chatting with old friends. We all laughed when we heard he ran out in his underwear the night before during the earthquake. Patty blazed a trail into our siesta and declared break time over. Plus Petrol had released our
cargo and she needed some muscles to help. I was glad Segundo's son, Alter, had joined our group. We needed all the stamina we could muster for this task of the cargo.

It would seem simple to just pull up on the side of the bank, load in the stuff, then float to the other side and unload the stuff. However the oil base side has metal stairs that in the 100-plus degrees would fry an egg and you're the bacon. I knew every pore was cleaned in my skin after that shower of sweat. I also lost all guilt of being put on the plane while the others had to endure the long bus/boat ride.

Later that day the two groups became one and the Ministry of Health joined us. Their leader was Dr. Bruno. He was a very likable person. He lived to play soccer to the fullest then cried for a pain shot later. Sorry Bruno! He was actually a very good sport in letting Alex and Ann practice IVs on him.

The next morning we arose to a whistle that was given to the cooks to use when food was ready. With my stomach filled, I was off to my first encounter with the Urarians. I have dreamed of this day since the last ill-fated floatplane. We had sped up the river years ago and I got only a glimpse of them from the riverbank. They are very different from the Achuar People. The women dress in red shirts and beautiful necklaces. The reaction to the clinic was different as well. The entire family would come. The husband would bring his wife and kids and the family would put their trust in us. The Achuar men usually would not be with their family at clinic.

Bonnie and I, with some assistance from Dr. Juan Carlos, would have to debride the wound of a small baby that had gotten too close to a fire. Her clothes had melted to her from the back of her neck to her ankles. In the States, this would be a very debilitating wound and the child would surely be in pain for a long time. The caring parents here put dragon's blood on her and after only a week most of her wound was healed. Dragon's blood comes from the sap of a tree and acts like an instant scab. It stops the bleeding and seals the wound from infection. We found only a small spot of infection on her leg, but otherwise the child was doing fine. After clinic we had some time to visit the village and admire the care they put into the children. On their little baby hammocks, they string seeds and various plastic objects that I assumed floated down the river. The village life appeared fairly happy here.

The next morning, Jim, who had been suffering from giardia, sat down along a wall for
breakfast. When he got up I noticed a large moth that also looked like he had a large nose. It turns out that this moth is venomous. Ya’ know about the snakes, caiman, spiders, but ya’ can’t forget about the deadly moths. What next? A vampire butterfly?

The next days would all blur together, only the highlights would stick out. I remember pulling over at night at an oil base for Jim to get emergency care for dehydration and Bonnie starting her bout of giardia. I remember telling her to go up on top of the riverbank for privacy when her nature’s call couldn’t wait, and much to her unfortunate timing the oil base had turned on all the lights to welcome Jim just as she squatted down. The guards definitely saw a full moon that night.

Another patient who was walking from one village to another collapsed. He was too ill to make it to our clinic so we made a house call. The man was feverish and restless. Ann placed her hands on his head to infuse the calming effects of Reiki therapy and soon the man peacefully dozed off into sleep. The next morning he was strong enough to finish the walk to our clinic.

Another very humbling moment was after a long clinic day. A doctor was questioning the ingratitude of the village when appeared a woman with two eggs as gifts. A simple gesture that would be known later over the world via this Internet.

After all the eye drops, fungal creams, machete wounds and parasites, it was time for the long relaxing boat ride back to Trompeteros. Bracey had his head on Ann's lap and as he began to drift off with the river's current, I thought I saw a butterfly glide into the boat. As the butterfly appeared to fly in front of Ann, she screamed out in pain and Bracey's head lifted like a soccer ball kicked by Alter. I thought, "Not the vampire butterfly! Patty screamed out, "It's only a fish!" Ann cried back, "But it's biting me!" I thought piranha, but in fact it turned out to be a species of catfish that sunk its spiny barbed fin into her leg. The quick thinking of the cook split the fish in two with her bare hands. Dr. Juan Carlos had to shoot her up with lidocaine and pry the barbed fin from her thigh. Patty had just said earlier in the day not to let our guard down. People get relaxed thinking it’s the last couple of days and that’s when accidents happen, but what can you do about a razor finned fish flying at you?

The sunsets are unearthly every day and the last one on the river makes you want to stay forever. As the sky fills with color you forget all about the weird things that could scare the daylights out of you. It was sad to say goodbye, but I know I will be back. Sitting at the airport in Lima waiting for my last flight out of the country, I got one last scare. The building started to
shake and the constant chatter fell silent. There was nowhere to run because of security checkpoints. The building stopped shaking and the chatter slowly reached back to normal levels. Only 4.5 on the Richter scale this time. The trip began with a rumble and ended with a rumble.

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