We had an amazing time in the jungle clinics. We visited 10 different villages and saw hundreds of patients. I've been working on starting IVs, giving a ton of shots, speaking Spanish and also getting to know the typical medications that are used here. I love working with the indigenous people and it is good to see some villages that take pride in their traditional roots. For them, the culture is still very strong. Other villages seem to struggle more.

One night, another of the nurse volunteers became very dehydrated due to giardia. We had to start an IV on him and take him to a clinic at an oil base so he could rest comfortably. We started the IV while in the boat on the Corrientes River. Then, we sped down the river in the night with an intermittent spotlight to keep us from hitting submerged trees or the riverbank. We got him there safely and he recovered within a few days.

We worked with two different populations, first the Urarinas. This group of people lives closer to the town of Trompeteros (though still two days travel). The women all wear red shirts and blue or black skirts. I wasn't able to pick up much of their language, but they do still speak in a traditional way. Ninety-nine percent of the women wouldn't talk to us and would even avert their eyes. It was unclear where this tendency had come from (someone said it was evangelical or it could have been traditional), but we had to work with these women through a male translator.

Of course, there were all types of infirmities: skin problems out numbered the rest except for parasites and lice, I think. We also saw more serious cases of septicemia and malaria, as well as leishmaniasis, where a fly bite causes a hard nodule that eventually starts to eat away at the skin. There was also a lot of dehydration and malnourishment. Of course, the waters are somewhat polluted from the oil industries and human waste, and unclean water creates ill health.

We worked with another indigenous group called the Achier. I did learn a bit of their language "maketay" means thank you and "trasha" is used as a greeting. Whenever I would meet someone I always greeted them in Achuar. Most people gave a good laugh to hear a gringo speaking in Achuar. It was great. I really liked some of these villages and wouldn't mind staying
in one for an extended period in order to learn more about the language and culture.

The people of Belen, where the clinic will be built, all have come from the jungle in search of a better life in the city. It is nice to have some reflection on what their lives were like beforehand. In some ways, the city is luring them with a false promise of prosperity because the living conditions are so poor. There is a lot of pollution in the air, and of course in the water. There is no proper sanitation, nor is there a good education to be had. The clinic we can build here will be invaluable. There is a clear case of being able to change people's lives.

Our last day we were riding the boat back to Iquitos when suddenly a fish jumped out of the water, bounced off my friend's umbrella, and landed on my leg. "A fish," I thought. Then, the fish was flapping around, but it stayed on the side of my leg and I realized my leg hurt. "Oh my god, it's biting me!" I believe is what I said. I thought it was a piranha. I grabbed it and pulled, but it didn't budge. Meanwhile, it was still flapping. I looked more closely and saw a spike coming out from its side and into my leg. Wow, I thought. Incredible. So, the spine had barbs and thus kept me connected to this flailing fish. We had to cut the fish off, inject me with a little lidocaine and pseudo-surgically remove the spine all while traveling in a fishing boat (not the yacht-type, mind you) down the Corrientes River. We all agreed I was going to go home with the best story. My leg swelled a bit after that, but I took some antibiotics to prevent infection. Hopefully there weren't any terrible blood-borne fish diseases in the little guy.

We made it back to Iquitos where we spent the next week seeing patients in Belen. We were able to work with Javier Villanes, an obstetrician who has long worked with Amazon Promise and whose way of practicing medicine is very inspiring, heartfelt and progressive. He is knowledgeable about plants and traditional Amazonian medicine. He understands where the people of Belen come from and I have never seen him turn a sick person away.

The other volunteers, Jim, Chris, Alex, and Bonnie all had their parts in making this trip into something wonderful. I have to say it was an incredible experience. There were times when we had to really rely on each other to make it through, and there were times we got to lay back, relax and laugh together.

The expedition was not an easy one, but with the perseverance of Patty Webster we made it through without a worry. She has an incredible intuition and drive to keep things on track. She is an inspiration to watch and learn from.
Ann wrote this report after the October 2005 Promise Expedition, which served the Achuar on the Corrientes River. Ann, who is the Fundraising Chairperson of Amazon Promise and an Honorary Board Member, was also on the organization's medical student trip in August 2003.