

Life As a Yagua
and
Gender Roles

Brittnee Gauthier
Age 17

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About Me

If someone ever asks me about myself I'm never quite sure what to say. But my name is Brittnee Aleece Gauthier, and I'm the youngest of three children. I have an older brother, Trey, and an older sister, Ashley. I have a father named Huey and a mother named Lisa. My father is in the Air Force and I was raised mostly on military bases. I was born in a small town located seven miles from Vandenberg Air Force Base in the beautiful town of Lompoc, California on June 30, 1988. Throughout my life I have moved a great deal. Starting in Lompoc, California to Denver, Colorado, next from Pensacola, Florida to my first experience in Europe, Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. I then moved to my mother's hometown of Palo Alto, California and lived in my mother's childhood home. After a year there, we moved to Bedford, Massachusetts, to Hanscom AFB. I didn't like it there as much as my previous home in East Palo Alto, so my brother and I moved back to East Palo Alto with our mom. I found that I enjoyed the school that I attended in Mountain View and the friends I made better in California than in Massachusetts. I graduated the 8th grade at Crittenden Middle School in Mountain View, California. After that, I enrolled in Carlmont High School where I am currently about to be a senior. I am an active member of Carlmonts' Black Student Union (BSU) and I have been the VP, Secretary, and this year the President. I am also heavily involved in an after school program for high school students in the Sequoia Union District called College Track. In College Track, I contribute to the newspaper, and I was also part of the senate, which is a group of students picked to voice the opinions of the other students. I forgot to mention that I am African American with a diverse heritage of Irish, French/Creole, Native American, and much, much more. I am seventeen years old, my favorite color is green, and I am often told that I'm amazing. I write many poems, and my friends and I

got together and wrote a play called “Why Blame the Town.” This play is about violence and stereotypes in my neighborhood. My favorite class in school is World History; I mainly enjoy learning about Greece and other ancient civilizations. I’m not so sure of what I want to be when I grow up, but I think I’ll have fun figuring it out.

What I Originally Wanted to Accomplish in the Amazon

Originally, when I came here, I wanted to escape the ordinary and experience the extraordinary. I live in a city where violence is accepted into our society and we no longer know how to deal with it. I wanted to escape that harsh reality and to learn from these people, a new way of creating peace. But not all of my reasons for going on this trip were so deep. I also came merely because I had nothing else to do over the summer and it seemed like lot of fun. It also helped that it was a chance for some really interesting journalism besides the normal “he said, she said, and I think” gossip. This trip just called to my inner being. Not only did it call to me, it left me a message that I played over and over in my mind. It said, “Brittnee, you have a chance to go to the Amazon and do what you love best; write.” That’s the last and most evident reason for this trip to the Rainforest and Amazon River.

I remember in the first grade when my teacher, Mrs. Jones, had just finished reading us The Island of The Blue Dolphins and we started learning about the Rainforest. As soon as we finished learning about it I was instantly in love with the Rainforest. Then, when I was older, I went to the Rainforest Café in San Francisco, and it sparked my curiosity even more because it was full of big artificial trees, monkeys, mushrooms, and an aquarium that made me really wonder about what the actual place looked like. These

are the reasons why I wanted to go on this trip originally, not to mention the chance to meet new, exciting people.

Methodology

With this project, I conducted research in different ways. In some cases I had personal interviews. During interviews, I would get information from two different sources. One source is what the person actually said. The other source is what I observed. As soon as I walked into someone's house for an interview, I would take note of what they were wearing, how they were sitting, what they were eating and other basic things. One example of that is our interview with Eleazar. As soon as we walked into his tropical home, I noticed his wife Celina boiling something in a pot, his grandchildren playing with his pet parrots on the floor, and he was sitting in a chair wearing a white-buttoned shirt, black pants, and black rain boots. I also get information by what I hear, taste, see, and smell around the village. An example of this is when we first arrived in the village, we passed a man in a boat sitting next to his wife and they were both doing the same job of washing yucca. This let me know that some couples do equal work. I also do research by merely participating in different activities. Some activities included basket making, chopping wood for a canoe, chewing yucca to make the alcoholic drink called Masato, and actually living with the Yagua. Lastly, I read people's emotions. I wanted to be able to know when someone was about to laugh, in the case of Angelina, or when someone was about to cry, in the case of Celina. Overall, I just had to remember that, unlike reading textbooks to get info, I could just ask around to get the answers that I was seeking for the questions that I wanted to ask.

Setting of our House

Our house in the village is sort of like a hut from Gilligan's Island. Our floor is a couple of feet off the ground to prevent any animals from getting into the house. Our roof is made with Irapay leaves which are used to make the water run off the roof more easily. The walls are nonexistent except in the kitchen and bedroom where there are three walls made up of the same leaves as the roof. The leaves that make up the roof get old and need to be replaced every six years. Our house is made of three huts of different sizes. The biggest one serves as the bedroom and the hangout spot. The second building serves as a dining room, where we eat all of our meals and sometimes have meetings and interviews. The third hut is the kitchen, but we don't really have access to this building because it is mainly used by the cooks and our guide. Bridges connect all of these rooms so that we can get around easier. We also have a bathroom and a shower. Those two rooms are connected to each other but they are separate from our house. The only furniture we have is a couple of mattresses, mosquito nets, two hammocks, and a table with benches for dining purposes. Chickens, pigs, palm trees, dogs and goats always surround our house. In the back of our house, down a hill is a huge lake. Our house is level with the rainforest canopy on the other side of the lake. The hammock overlooks the soothing lake. When the moon shines on the lake, it is like a mirror reflecting the joy you had that day. I like the tropical feel of it and how the walls are open. I also enjoy not needing locks for the mere fact that I don't have any doors. Here, the roof is just a bunch of beams stacked with leaves at the top so it is really easy to climb the walls to the top of my roof. Some things that I really miss are electricity and a refrigerator. If I had a fridge, I could have

popsicles, or ice cream, or just stick my head in the coolness. In case you couldn't catch on, I guess I should let it be known that it is very hot in the Rainforest, and our hut is no exception.

Setting Part II

To describe the village that we are in, I would have to describe a world surrounded in mystery. To get to our remote village, I flew to Iquitos, Peru from San Francisco, California, rode a speedboat up the Amazon, rode a moto carro across a remote part of Mazan to Indiana, then took another hour-long boat ride up the Napa River, through a tributary, across a lake, to my destination. To get into our village we have to dock our boat, then climb ashore to the small village. I climb a flight of rickety stairs and at the top of the stairs there is a big statue of a Yagua man blowing a blowgun. Next to the statue is the village store. Here you can buy necessities such as shoes, rice, oil and my personal favorites, candy and soda. Further down from the store is the Evangelical church and other tropical houses. When we first arrived, we had to stay in the community center that is in the center of the village surrounded by houses and a soccer field. The community center resembles a barn in my opinion because it is just a big empty space with a high roof and low walls. The houses are separated into different categories. We live in a nicer house because ours is bigger than the others. The chief, for instance, lives in what I would call the slums, or the projects. I say this because all the houses around his look the same; just one-room houses where the people eat, sleep and work, all in the same space. The house also looks tacky in my opinion, because it has animals like chickens and ducks running all over the place. The eternal chief, however,

lived in what I like to call the waterfront flats. These are essentially the same structure of houses as the rest of the village, except these houses have a bigger room to live in than the others. Also, these houses have a good view to the lake because when I look out of the window, that is exactly what I see. There is also a traditional side of town, but only the people differ because the houses pretty much stay the same. There are no phones, no electricity, no big buildings, or bathtubs. There are, however, loads of trees, bridges, laughing children, birds, bugs, and village people. Another fun part of the setting is the farm animals. Each house or hut comes stocked with its own chickens, roosters, dogs, pigs, and chickens. The weather is usually hot and humid except for the days when it's windy or rainy. The sounds are something you'd imagine from a sci-fi movie because each animal makes a different sound. There are even birds that make sounds like the wind and the water rushing by. The rest I will leave up to your imagination.

Limitations

I find that whenever I try to do something, it never quite works out as planned; there is always something that doesn't run as smoothly as everything else. There are many instances of this during my visit. One of them is the language barrier that is naturally there between the Yagua and us. One example of this is when we interview an old Yagua lady. She only speaks the native Yagua language, so when we speak with her, we first have to translate from English to Spanish, then from Spanish to Yaguan. All this translating takes twice the time of the other interviews, when we merely have to translate from English to Spanish. This also results in us getting only half of the questions answered and half of the information.

Another limitation is the factor of time. Sometimes, we will be in the middle of a good interview where we are getting some really good information but then we will run out of time and have to end it. Time also factors in when you think about the amount of time we have to actually conduct all of our research. We only have three weeks to live with these people and figure out their entire way of life, and most researchers stay for almost a year when they are really trying to figure out a new culture, so some of our research is not going to be complete at every angle. Another limitation that forms a problem for my research is people's lack of knowledge for the questions that I ask. I can't tell you how many times we ask a question but we aren't able to get the answers because the person didn't seem to have one. One of my first interviews is with Angelina. I ask her what is her favorite food and she says, "fish". I then ask her what is her favorite color and she says, "big fish". She then goes on about this big fish that she likes to eat and how tasty it is. Sometimes the interviewee will be late for the interview so we have less time to ask questions. In one extreme case with the chief, he just never shows up so we have to come back another time. Another limitation is the fact that people don't always feel comfortable with letting simple words leave their mouth. Sometimes one of us will have a question that we are too shy to ask. In other cases, the other person is too shy to answer. All these reasons are why I am not able to conduct a complete study on my topic.

A Poem I Write

The ancient spirits sing to me
They're there in every sight I see
The rain can wash away my fears
The sun can dry up all my tears
My life is a story not yet told
I don't quite fit into the mold
I see shades of green
My favorite color
I'm in a new scene
Unlike any other
An ancient village taught to survive
The Yagua's strive to stay alive

Journal Question

-How does being out of the city affect you? Do you feel saner?

Yes, I do feel like taking a step out of my usually hectic life to come out here has shown me how crazy I have been. I mean how nuts do you have to be to stay someplace where you inhale smog and smoke on a daily basis and not think anything of it? It is also crazy how we all come from similar origins, people existing in what we call wilderness and for this brief time we call it home, yet we wouldn't be able to live without technology. I honestly think we're so bonkers in the city because of the lack of oxygen. In the city, it is hard to trust other people as well. Out here, however, community goes

much farther than just the name of a group of houses close to each other. It's an action; it's how they live. They count on each other without worrying about murders and theft and that fact makes them quite sane. But what really lets me know that I'm a little "cool for coco puffs" is the fact that I'm surrounded by all this fresh air, good people and beautiful sights, and all I can think about is getting back home to my city life. Crazy, isn't it?

My letter to God

Dear God Almighty,

Hi, I hope you're doing pretty good up there. I hope you're taking good care of my family, friends, and even my enemies. Thank you so much for that. Well, I really wanted to write this letter for you just in case you didn't hear my prayer. I already know you did but I just wanted to make sure that you would keep me safe during this whole trip and don't let me get bit by anymore insects or anything else. If you are having trouble with watching me and my family, I'm sure my grandmas wouldn't mind taking the job. Well, I'd appreciate it if you could give me a sign that you're working on it. Maybe you can wake me up to see the sunrise or something. Thank you so much. And please let my family know how much I miss and love them and let these next thirteen days pass quickly and safely. I thank you for everything that you have given my family, my friends, the world, and me. I hope you get this soon, and don't forget the mosquitoes, thanks again. Amen.

Gender Roles

The main topic that I am studying is gender roles because I think it would be interesting to see how a different culture deals with them. I know in America women are created and treated equally. For example, in my neighborhood at Jones Mortuary, his wife always helps him with stuff, and my Auntie Lynn even owned her own hat business. In Menlo Park, one of the more successful churches was built and is run by a woman, and in Louisiana, my Teeda runs a set of project buildings. We definitely have some power as women in America. Because of this, I am anxious to see if this is so in other places. I got mixed results. In some houses, the woman is the stronger one. For example, this lady named Clara is said to beat her husband down on a regular basis, just because she's bigger than him. In Angelina's case, she talks to her husband in any way she feels, because she can. However, in the case of other women, they don't even answer a question without getting the "o.k." from their husband, and of course there are many examples in between.

Nirvana and Maximo

Nirvana, at age twenty-two, is one of the prettiest women in the village, but she is not from the village. She was born and raised in Iquitos until she met her husband and moved to the village with him. She has been living in the village for seven years. Her husband, Maximo, is twenty-eight years old and he makes oars. The two of them have two sons and a daughter and Nirvana is pregnant with another child. She hopes that it is a girl, so that her children will be evened out; Maximo also wants a girl. When we ask Maximo if he wants any more children, he quickly looks over at Nirvana and when she gives him a certain look, he quickly turns back to us and says that he is fine with four. I

think it is cute how he checks with Nirvana before saying anything; this reveals that they work together in their relationship. While we are in their house for the interview, Maximo is working on an oar light enough for his daughter to hold. He is doing this because he is going to teach his daughter how to go canoeing all by herself. He has also taught her how to fish by herself. I think this is pretty cool because usually the girls only learn how to fetch water, wash clothes, and cook, but she is learning to do what the boys learn. I am then curious and so I ask him what men are and aren't allowed to do. He answers that he can cook and baby-sit the children, but he can't wash or make Masado. No man can. Masado is a drink that is made when women chew up boiled yucca and spit it out continuously, then let it sit and ferment. When it is done, it serves as an alcoholic drink that the people enjoy a lot. But let me just say that the process of making it isn't so great, especially when you have a 70-year-old woman with missing teeth spitting out what you still have to put in your mouth.

Nirvana and Maximo met in the city when they were younger. Maximo moved to the city because his father told him that he would find better job opportunities out here. Unfortunately, he only had a fourth grade education and didn't get much work. However he did meet his future wife while visiting some family members who lived near her. He had another woman and children before he met Nirvana, but they don't tell much about her or the children since it's a sensitive subject for Nirvana. Good thing they haven't heard of child support in the jungle, or he would be getting served.

Nirvana cooks for the younger children and all they have to do is entertain themselves. Their daughter, however, is old enough to cook and clean for herself, so she does. Her ears are pierced because Nirvana wanted her to look nice. Nirvana told us that guys don't wear long hair because it looks like a girl, and because it would be too hot and

bother them. Even though many girls of the age of sixteen have babies in the village, there are forms of birth control available to them: pills, condoms and the shot. She does know about STDs and most women do use protection when they have sex. She tells us that the people in the village don't ask or tell about AIDS and STDs, though the most common thing around is Gonorrhea. There are natural forms of birth control, though only a few people know how to make them.

Sometimes, when Nirvana is all by herself with some free time, she goes up to the soccer field to see if anyone is playing futbol. If there are other moms with children up there, she plays with them, or simply watches. She has a group of friends in the village and they hang out and help each other clean their houses, and do other things together. Nirvana tells us that the most important thing to have in a friendship is trust. She is more religious than her husband. He just agrees with her. She tells us that she thinks that men's roles and women roles are fair because if she gets sick, then her husband will have to wash his own clothes. Here, the men prepare the land and the women plant the seeds. Men fish and women cook, men build and women clean. She says that in her religion the man is the head of the family and the woman is the body, so the woman has to do whatever her husband tells her to do. Even with that notion in her head, she seems like a strong woman with a lot of power in her relationship, and they seem like they have a healthy relationship.

Maximo Senior-The Midwife

His name is Maximo Cahuachi, and he is forty-nine years old. He has 12 children: six girls and six boys. His wife's name is Theresa. He was born in a Lliachapa village on the Napa River. He moved to this particular village when he was twenty-seven. He says

that he is one of the founders of this village. His father died seven years ago and his mother is still alive and lives in the village with him. Maximo moved to this village because he lacked food in the village where he came from. He is one of three midwives in the whole village. The other two midwives are his mom and Celina. He says his job is to make sure that the baby is in the right position. He works with the woman right before she has the baby, so no prenatal care. Maximo says he can tell that there is five minutes before the birth if the mother's head is hot. If there is a difficulty in the birth, then he makes a special tea out of otra de platenno, which helps the baby move. During the birth process, the woman is on her knees with them spread. She holds a rope with her hands and he is behind her, helping to push the baby down in the stomach. The woman's mom is usually in the room but the husband is usually scared and doesn't want to see the process. If the baby is coming out feet first, its feet get pushed back in and the mother is hung upside down, then she has to continue with the process. When the baby is born the baby's godfather cuts the umbilical cord, not the father or the midwife. The women get to choose which midwife they want to use and Maximo gets just as much business as women because they don't care if the midwife is a man or a woman. It took him 15 days to become a licensed midwife in school, opposed to the four years minimum it would take to even become a nurse in a college in America. During the time we spend in the village, there are nine births. There are no children in the village training to be a midwife. Maximo is concerned about who is going to deliver babies after he is gone. Perhaps they will have to travel to a nearby town and hospital and stay there until the baby comes, but probably not. He tells us that he still recognizes every one of the thirty-three children that he gave birth to. It helps that half of them are his grandchildren. He tells us about the olden days of Yagua, when the women would go off into the jungle to have their baby

with just their husband. The husband would do nothing to help, but he would watch her just so nothing could get her. We talk to another woman named Manuela who said that is how she said she gave birth to her children. I won't take the time to quote her whole interview though, because we didn't get much else from her except the fact that she likes her clothes a lot. Manuela wears traditional Yagua clothes and she doesn't speak Spanish, so we translate our whole conversation twice each way. A lot of the information gets lost in translation. On that note, back to Maximo. A midwife can tell how far along a pregnancy is by watching the full moons. Some women have a lot of pain so they use coke leaves to relieve the pain. As we finish the interview and I watch Maximo rock in his hammock surrounded by his grandchildren and children, I know that he really found his calling by becoming a midwife.

Meredi

Meredi is a 19-year-old girl with a five-month-old daughter. I interview her because she is a young mother and I always see her walking around the town with only her daughter. She is from that village and she was born there. Meredi went to school but only to the fifth grade. She stopped going because she got married. Her husband, Neyroj, is 18 years old. He is a gardener, and her only job is to take care of her daughter. She tells me that most of her friends have children around her daughter's age, so they can play together. When I ask her if she wishes she had more time to be a kid before she had children she says that yes, she regrets dropping out of school but doesn't know what she would be doing if she didn't have her daughter. She tells me that if she could be anything in the world she would be an operator and she would like to plant plants because they're nice. I really don't get much information from this interview, and I am sort of frustrated

with this girl because she really doesn't know what she wants to do with her or her daughter's life. She reminds me of a lot of girls I know in America who get pregnant at a young age and are forced to grow up too quickly. It is a little scary because in their culture, it is normal for young girls to have babies so young, and I fear the same thing will happen to our culture in the future because teen pregnancy is getting so common.

Jains Cuhuachi Rios and Greti Ajan Lancy

The next couple I interview are not that interesting to me either. They are the people who braid leaves for the roves on houses. They aren't married but they live together and have a daughter. They do equal work in the roof making business and they both have equal say. They both go into the jungle to gather leaves for an hour and then they both go back home and start braiding the leaves. If he makes ten, then she too makes ten. They say they are doing their business so that their daughter can have a bright future when she grows up, unlike them. I notice that a bunch of people in the village consider themselves failures because they live in the village, but it makes me wonder, who do they compare themselves to? I notice when I ask questions, even ones I direct to Greti, that Jains will always answer for her. I don't know if she is too shy or he is too controlling, but I know I am too annoyed to sit here and ask another question so I end this interview pretty quickly.

Eleazar, The Storyteller

The last person I have to tell about is Eleazar. There is no special reason why I'm saving him for last except for the mere fact that I don't really know where else to put him, and I really want him in here.

When we walk into his house he is working on some crutches he's making from a tree. When he finishes carving them, he walks around with them, having fun. He is

wearing black rubber rain boots, black pants and a white shirt. Eleazar is also a founder of the village. When he was 14 years old, his parents died so he had to look for work. That is why he moved to that village. He met Pablo Polico who taught him to be Evangelist. Eleazar tells us that girls aren't allowed to wear makeup, that there's no vanity, no living in the world, and that a man is only allowed one wife. He is the Eternal Chief in this village, which is really important. He tells us that there are such things as women pastors, but they aren't allowed to preach, just sing. He goes on to talk about birth control and abortions, which he does not believe in at all. He really gets interesting when he tells us this story: one time when he was hunting, a spirit came to him and told him that he didn't need to hunt the animals, that he needed to protect them. He has some other good stories, but I just can't remember them right now. I do, however, remember that when he tells stories, he smiles and laughs and he makes the stories seem really suspenseful at times. Because of this, I dub him Eleazar, the Storyteller.

Other topics I studied and people I learned from

Religion, Education, and Julio Perez Pipa

Religion plays a major role in the lives of every person in the village. There are two main religions in the village that the people practice. One was Catholicism and the other was Evangelism. Although the people don't follow all of the rules of the two religions, everyone in the village identifies with one or the other. Education, however, isn't so important to everyone. There are some people who regret not finishing school and some who feel it was a waste of time anyway. The teachers take pride in the subjects that they teach, and the students are a mixed bag.

Celina

We have many interviews with Celina and her husband, Eleazar. When we ask her how old she is, she looks over to her husband and asks him, "How old am I?" He yells back, "69!" And that is our answer. It is funny to me because the people here are never quite sure of the time, date or anything like that. It also shows how good of a relationship the two have. Celina tells us that her male children were hard to raise because they were always getting sick. They got the chicken pocks, but doctors wouldn't come around at that time, so they didn't really know of a cure. Now a days, a boat full of doctors and dentists go to this remote village twice a year to help anyone who needs to be helped. People seem to rely on them for their medical help. Celina has lost two girls and three boys. She has 35 grandchildren, including one named Christian, who is four years old and stays with her because his mom left with her new husband who used to beat Christian. Two of Celina's daughters live on the Napa River in Camposeria. Some of her

daughters had to leave the village because their husbands had jobs in other towns. She has a daughter in Brazil with her children and husband. Celina says that she was 21 when she had her last child, and 14 when she had her first. She says that when she was younger, her dad had three different wives, so she had to get a job to help out her family and mother. Her first two children were by a different man but Eleazar helped raise them along with their other twelve kids. They have been married for 25 years. Celina says she decided to get married because she didn't want to work as hard as she used to without him. She says, besides, he was a good-looking hard worker.

Celina was baptized into the Catholic religion when she was ten. She says that when she was Catholic, she and her husband would fight a lot and she would hit him with a big stick, but when she turned thirty, she became Evangelist, saying it changed her life. They never fought again and she stopped smoking and drinking like she had in the past. Like most people in the village, she sleeps on the floor with her husband. Her house is not finished because her son, who was working on it, got drunk one day and fell off a bridge and died. When she tells us this story she gets really quiet and I can tell that she is going through something. She starts telling a story about how her mom died around the same time as her son. Elmer, a son in the village who is the pastor for the Evangelist church, would always come to her house to try and sympathize with her, but she would just tell him that he couldn't relate because both of his parents are still alive. She tells us of her other son who is an Evangelist and his wife who is not. She says his wife left him with the three children because she wanted to party. Celina wants to go visit him and see who's washing the clothes, but with all of her children and her grandchildren to take care of, she can't afford to go. She says she just wants them to go to school and learn and

incorporate God into everything that they do. She didn't finish school and because of that, she feels like she has suffered in life.

Angelina

Angelina is a 74-year-old Yagua woman, but says she feels like a fifteen-year-old girl. Despite what she thinks of herself, Celina mentioned that she is one of the oldest women in the village. Angelina has a five-month-old sloth named Mario. He got his name from a guy in a different village that Angelina thought was cute, but because she already had a husband, she had to live with having a sloth named after him instead of the real man. Angelina makes crafts like cloth bags, necklaces, and hammocks with the other women and her daughter and sister. She had four grandchildren but tells us that one died because he had bad spirits in him and they couldn't get them out. Angelina is Catholic, so she says, but she also practices love spells to get younger men to fall in love with her. Her favorite food is fish, her favorite animal is fish and when I asked of her favorite color, she said fish again, but this time a big fish. She then starts laughing hysterically, and I take it that she doesn't know what she is talking about, so I take this moment to end our informal interview on the bridge outside of our house. After the interview we witness her beat a tarantula to death with a big stick. Then we take a picture of her and when a little girl looks at the camera to see the picture, Angelina pushes her head into the lens and starts laughing again. This lets me know that she is either a jokester or just a crazy old lady, but either way she seemed very happy.

Victor

Victor is a schoolteacher and the soccer captain of the Yagua team. He is 30 years old; he has three children and a wife. He is from a place called Padrecocha, translated into “Father Lake”, and his people are the Cocama. Victor teaches English and Economy. We interview him on a very rainy day and everything looks pretty gloomy, but he turns it all around. As he walks up through the rain, he is wearing a bright orange rain poncho and hiking boots. When he gets into our nearly completed house and he takes off his poncho I am amused to see his outfit revealed. He has on khaki shorts, blue socks that are pulled up well past the top of his boots, and a bright yellow soccer jersey that matches his bright smile capped with two gold teeth. I am amused because the soccer jersey seems to be a part of his everyday wardrobe. Every time I see him, he is wearing some form of soccer jersey.

When he enters the house, instead of the usual “Buenos Dias,” he greets us with “Malo Dias,” which means bad day. It makes sense for the occasion because the weather is so bad that it isn’t such a good day after all. During the interview, Victor tells us that he studied in a University in Iquitos for five years and became a teacher at the age of 25. He says that when you try to go to a University here, you must first take a placement test, and if you don’t pass, you won’t get accepted. He tells us that he enjoys teaching the values of life, and sports to the children. In this village most of the kids enjoy playing sports. This reminds me of back home in America, where some of the prized students are the ones who play football on the all-star team or some other sport. He enjoys teaching in the village; however, he did not choose to go here. When he graduated from the university, the teachers’ board in Iquitos chose for him to come here and teach. He tells us that the students aren’t really motivated to finish school even though they can’t get a

good job without finishing school. If you just finish high school in the village, you could get a job at Explorama, which is a company that takes tourists around the different villages to see the different tribes. He warns the students that if they don't have an education they will never be able to leave the village. The hours for a normal school day vary for the different grades. For elementary kids, school hours are from 7:30 until noon. High school and middle school runs from 12:30 until 5:00 in the afternoon.

We then change our focus from school to his favorite pastime, soccer. When asked of his favorite soccer player, he replies with "Claudio Pizarro", a Peruvian man who plays for Spain. The Yagua team plays in a soccer tournament and it is very important to win because the winning team either gets a generator or a weed whacker. It is sad for me to say that I really doubt they will win anything though, because they play poorly at the one game we attended. They lost by at least two points, though the saddest part is that most of them got drunk right before the game. But I won't tell that to anybody in the village because everybody has to have a dream.

Marta

Marta is a 35-year-old Yagua woman who teaches school. She has one daughter and one son; she also takes care of her niece. Well, she lets her 15-year-old niece stay with her, but it is clear that she is really there to care for Marta's bad little daughter Marta Clara, who they claim to be two years old, but really looks like she could be four or five years old. Marta teaches five subjects: math, logics, science, religion, and she didn't really say the last one. After school, if her students need help, they are welcome to go over to her house to get an extra tutoring session.

Marta's mom is Yagua and her dad is Chipibo from Pocalpa. She was born in Palmera and her parents still live there. Palmera is just a different Yagua tribe located down the Amazon River. I notice that whenever we talk to anybody and they mention where they are from, they always say up or down the Napa or Amazon, as opposed to up highway 101, or across the bridge like we often say. She says that when she was younger and lived with her aunt and worked at a clothing store, she decided she either wanted to be a teacher or a nurse. Due to the fact that her godmother's sister was a teacher, she decided to be one too. She explains to us that the parents in this village don't really push their kids to go to school. Throughout our stay I hear a number of times about how the students don't go to school all the time and the parents don't go to meetings, which I learned is a common thing with a few parents in the U.S. as well. Some parents just don't understand. Plus it doesn't help that most of the parents that we interview only went to school up to the fifth grade or around there.

Marta went on to say how irresponsible the parents are here and how they expect her and the other teachers to take care of and raise their children for them. I find this funny because just as she is saying this, her daughter is behind her reaching for a shelf to get some nail polish, and she nearly pulls a large machete onto Marta. Marta never notices what her daughter almost did because she is too busy talking. It takes someone from our group to move the machete, to ensure Marta Clara's safety. Marta then talks about her religion. She is Catholic, and she teaches Catholicism class using the Bible. She does respect other religions though, so when she teaches she lets the Evangelist children practice writing their name or something of that nature. Although half of the village is Catholic, there is no Catholic church, so the dedicated members go to a different village to go to church, though most of the people don't ever go. She says that the difference

between the two religions is that one permits dancing and drinking and the other, the Evangelist, does not. She then starts to talk about the way that the people dress. They all dress in western clothes, like something you would see in America. Granted, the fashion is something you would see a couple of years back, but nonetheless, it is regular clothes. She wishes that everyone in the village would go back to what their ancestors wore which is a red skirt and well, that's all. She says that other Yagua villages still do dress traditionally but her village doesn't because they are ashamed of their culture. They are ashamed because when they do dress like that, the other villages tease them, so they stopped. I think that it is sad when you let other people change who you are as a person, but that's just what they did. In fact, that's how they got their Evangelist religion in the first place. One day a missionary from Miami, named Pablo Polico, came to the village and told everyone about the Evangelist religion and basically told everyone what they were doing wrong with their lives. He made the unmarried couple get married and helped convert everyone to be Evangelist. When he was finished, he returned to Miami. It's kind of funny for me to imagine how someone from Miami could go to a place like that and change the future for an entire village, but then again all it takes is one person to make a change.

Lino

Lino is 43 years old and he is the town shaman. He has a 26-year-old wife named Elizabetha and four children of the ages six, five, three and nine months. Lino tells us that he is Catholic and Ayahuascero, which means that he is skilled in making Ayahuasca. He says that he makes Ayahuasca with six different ingredients: chacruna leaves, yauma

bark, yacchimbiyu bark, tobacco smoke, ayahuasca leaves, and scilisanlango leaves. It takes a day to cook it all. He only makes it on special days, Tuesday and Thursday, and he uses it “to cleanse out the spirit,” as our translator puts it. Lino first took Ayahuasca at the age of 22 when he was given some by his uncle who also made the stuff. After that he took an apprenticeship with the plants and the plant spirits would talk to him and guide him. Aside from the plant spirits, he gets guidance from his Icaros, which is a song given to him from God that he uses to heal people’s spirits. He tells us that if any of his children were to carry on after him to be a shaman, it would be his oldest daughter. Although nobody else in his family, not even his wife, knows how to prepare Ayahuasca, he uses it for his whole family’s health. Because he is a shaman, he takes voyages into the forest where he goes without salt or cooked food so that the plants speak clearly with him. He says that he doesn’t use black magic, although he reveals that he has in his past. He also says that he doesn’t believe in animal spirits, angels, fairies, or things like that; he does, however, believe in other beings. I don’t quite understand how someone can believe in the spirits in plants but not animals, but I suppose it makes sense to him.

One of his practices is that he can read energy in people’s bodies. He believes that he can see where the energy is in the body. He can see, hear, and feel the energy that he detects. He tells us that the language the plants speak is one all its own. He believes that he is the only one that can hear it. He uses his hand and the crucifix to heal people and send energy. He uses his walls by singing to keep bad energy out. He meditates and prays everyday. He feels like it is his calling to be a shaman. He is never afraid while alone in the forest because he feels there are always beings surrounding him. He doesn’t feel like his two different religions conflict because he says that they are similar. He does, however, have problems with the Evangelists because they don’t believe in the shaman.

He says that Eleazar told the people that Lino doesn't have a God and that he is evil, and that is the reason why he lives so far away. It also doesn't help his case that the shaman before him killed people until he got kicked out of the village. I can relate to his struggle with the people in the village because similar to him, when we got to the village there was a common belief that we were all contract killers sent to wipe out their race. I can definitely understand how Lino's medicine can get confused with voodoo or something of that matter. Lino goes on to tell us that he gets along with Elmer, the pastor, and they both respect each other. He then tells us of another potion that he uses, called *hwirocwaski rojo*, which he uses to cure stomach, kidney, and other internal problems. To keep mosquitoes away, he uses the leaves from a breadfruit tree, and to take away the itch from bites, he uses lemon. It sort of makes me wonder how reliable his repellent is if he has to have a cure for itching as well, but I guess he has to know the cure just in case. He says that *Ayahuasca* cures everything, even Malaria, but that no one believes in it anymore so he can't help them. He goes on to tell us how the people use Western medicine such as pills, but how he can't use pills because they just don't work for him; he must use natural medicines from the plants because the other medicines affect his intelligence. He then starts telling us about his time with black magic.

He says that the definition of black magic is when you use magic to make something happen. He stopped using it to become a shaman because to use black magic you have to be evil. Our translator says that in order to use black magic you would have to kill somebody and take their heart out and a demon would come and convert you. Naturally, I think back to Louisiana where they practice voodoo and I automatically know that it's not anything to play with. He started practicing black magic when he was 19, when he bought a *Black Cat* book from his friend in Iquitos. Lino tells us that he does

believe in evil spirits and he doesn't think they have any power over him. He says when he was practicing black magic he had no religion but then the Catholic religion started to get to him and it changed him, for the better. He realized that when he was practicing black magic, he was being controlled versus when he became Catholic, he was set free. I then start to notice details about him.

He is a very frail older man with an odd walk. He is very soft spoken, but he seems very confident. He tells us that he heals with three main things, which are prayer, tobacco smoke, and plants. When he mentions tobacco smoke for healing, I instantly thought of my grandma, who died of cancer and ask if he knows of the disease. He says he's heard about the disease and doesn't believe that it comes from tobacco, but from wounds in people's bodies. He went on, saying that tobacco is a sacred tool used only for healing. I then realize that it's not just the tobacco that causes cancer but the tons of other things in cigarettes that people smoke for fun. ** I would now like to briefly interrupt this paper to say to anyone reading it that tobacco is wacko, and unless you're a shaman, don't do drugs, arrive alive, don't drink and drive, and stay in school.** Since Lino has heard of cancer, I'm curious to know if he has any cures, and am excited to hear that he does. He says he has some plants called Ubos Rojos, and he uses its bark when cancer is starting. He also uses Chuchuwaski bark, raw and grated and sprinkled into water like tea. He says that if you drink it in the morning and afternoon for however long you're sick, then it will cure you, but when you drink it you must take a shower, because it's very strong.

I am excited to learn of this new cure, but all that is false hope, because the Shaman then admits that no one has actually come to him with cancer, so he doesn't know if it really works. After the interview, he started reading the energy of the different

people in my group. I admit I am a skeptic, but think, if there were disciples in the Bible, then why can't there be healers in the world of today? And if he's not really healing anybody, then who am I to tell him that? Besides, he has to be listening to something out in the forest that kept him safe. This is around the time that he makes the comment that all the religions are basically the same, but they just call them different things. This thought tickles me, because I think he is right with this comment. I'm amused to see Lino at the Independence Day celebration a few days later, because we learn that he is also the sheriff of the village. Imagine that, the shaman that nobody depends on to heal them is the same person who is responsible for protecting them. This shows that no matter who you are, you can be whatever you want.

Julio Perez Pipa

Julio Perez Pipa is one of the most interesting people in the village. He is 52 years old and a passionate Chief of the village. It is funny because he is also a passionate drinker and is tipsy when we interview him. We schedule interviews with him twice because the first time we were supposed to meet up, he never came. All of that aside, I recall his story. He has been the chief of this village for one year. He was born in Iquitos in a floating house and he moved with his family after eight months of life. He moved to the village in 1974. He says that there was no high school when he was little. He has two kids after two of his children died, and one wife. His wife has no privileges being the chiefs' wife; she does what every other woman does.

He tells us that there are elections with usually four or five candidates and the people vote using sticks. Basically, every eligible voter gets a stick and on voting day, the voter takes the stick up to the person they want to vote for and the person with the most

sticks becomes the new chief. The teachers do all of the counting of the ballots. When we ask Julio why he won, he replied that it was probably because of his honesty and his youth. He recalls how he got 57 votes, the most out of the other three candidates. The eligible voters include men, women, and 16 year olds, who are considered adults in their culture. He also says that a term lasts two years, but you can keep running for as long as you like. He tells us that he and the other chiefs do get together for meetings whenever they are called to discuss problems in the villages. The chief council had a meeting in April and they discussed land and property, but Julio states that his first priorities as chief are always the necessities of his village. He keeps on saying that he really wants a small clinic to help the sick people of his village. I can personally say that this is a good idea because every day a different person comes up to us trying to get some of our medicine.

Julio has accomplished some things for his village, like starting a garden and a fish farm and his current project of creating a new high school. Along with the chief, there is also a town secretary, treasurer, and vice president. He doesn't have an office yet and he does his work out of his house, but he plans on getting an office built specifically for the Chief to do business. The laws of the village are that the people have to keep the streets, the school, and the cemetery clean; if they don't they will get fined three soles, which is equivalent to less than a dollar. The town has a dungeon and four police officers, however there isn't much crime that goes on. An interesting thing he says is that women are allowed to run to be chief, but none ever have. This reminds me of our presidency and how women and ethnic people don't ever run, except for this past election where they all dropped out. Julio then tells us a little more about his personal life. He is Evangelist but he drinks a lot. He respects all religions but he thinks Evangelism is the more convenient of the two. He used to go to the shaman for help and he respects him very much. Other

than performing his duties as chief, he makes canoes and goes fishing like the other ordinary men. He really takes pride in his job, which is to take care of the village, and even though he is usually drunk, I can respect that.

How this trip affected My Life

I believe that anything worth doing is worth learning from, so that's how I try to live my life. This trip to the Amazon wasn't any different. I feel like I've learned a lot of things on this trip that will affect my life for a very long time. From this village, I learned that it is possible to have different types of people and to have no violence. It taught me that I can't control how other people act around me or react to me, but I can control me. I really feel like I accepted who I am and I'm comfortable with just being me. I realized that everything isn't always going to work as I planned it, but if I roll with the punches it will all be fine. I learned that time does fly when you're having fun, that spiders aren't as bad as they seem and that fashion does count, even in the jungle. I learned all people have similar traits, even the ones with no electricity and that every child enjoys watching TV, even if it's just a recording on a video camera. I realized how much I miss my family when I'm not around them. It seems like I even miss the people who back home I really can't stand. I now know that I can get along fine with people that I barely know as long as I'm open-minded. I also realize that I can't really live without songs or music, so I always make my own. I learned that I'm not as closed-minded as I thought and I'm really open to what other people believe. I did find out that I do feel sorry for people and I feel better than others. When we first arrived, I noticed that all the children had holes in their clothes and I really felt bad for them. But I had to take a second and realize that they were happy with it, so I shouldn't be the one to feel ashamed. Lastly, and least importantly, I

learned that I get sick of certain food really quickly; I don't like palm hearts, lentils, yucca or deer meat. I get sick of rice, chicken, and plantains really easily. I rather enjoy mashed potatoes, crackers, and beans. And I absolutely can't live my life without sugar! Above all, I learned that I'm going to be me no matter what my surroundings are so I just have to accept that fact and get really good at it while I can.

Things That I Learned

I learned the following from my trip to the Yagua village. There are effective cures other than western medicine that people use. It's a natural trait for humans to want quick solutions, i.e. taking medicine in the form of pills when they could just go to the shaman or make something from the plants they have. The two different religions just agree to disagree on a lot of things and that stops a lot of drama from taking place. People naturally like to have a leader, even if it is just a drunken chief. Sometimes the tastiest Masado comes from the mouth of a woman who is missing a lot of her teeth. Even in the rainforest, teen pregnancy is still happening, and birth control aids are everywhere. I learned that when you travel, you should always have some spare toilet paper because you never know when you'll need it. I also learned that even if you never heard of Picasso or anyone like that you can still be a decent artist. Everyone likes to smile, even the people who don't always brush their teeth. I learned that just like in America, the relationships that people have are like a mixed pot, you get all types of different things and nobody is perfect. Lastly, I learned that a 30-page paper is really hard when it's just in your mind, but when you start to type it out, it's a little easier. A special thanks to all of the other girls and the guides who helped me learn that there are some really nice people out in the world; I just have to take the time to get to know them.