



# *Warriors in Eden*

*by*

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*with*

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*In memory of Mario and Roy*

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# PROLOGUE

*The vast, fertile valley in central Peru takes its name from the muddy Ene River that flows south to north. The valley lies between the towering Andes to the west and the nearly as formidable Vilcabamba Range to the east.*

*It is some of the earth's most pristine land. The numerous tributaries of the Ene flow east and west, feeding down from the highlands, eroding the soil, and creating intricate patterns in the topography. The headwaters of the Amazon are often found descending limestone cliffs in stunning cascades as they work their way toward the distant Brazilian border. Springs and rivers disappear underground and, just as suddenly, reappear. This inland side of Peru is subject to monsoonlike rains throughout the summer months of January, February, and March, which, at lower altitudes, create a natural greenhouse. The land is rife with timber and an exotic array of plant life. Banks of exquisite miniature orchids cling to the ground and to the bark of trees in the foothills and lowlands. The soil is hospitable to oranges, mangoes, bananas, pineapple, coconut, papaya, and avocados.*

*For centuries, the Ashaninka (pronounced "ah-SHA-nin-ka") tribe lived here in exquisite solitude. But by the latter decades of the twentieth century, the world was encroaching. The Ashaninka needed health care and job training and an introduction to modern economic realities. Most of all, they needed education. It was for these purposes that with the assistance of numerous dedicated colleagues I cultivated a mission compound at the juncture of the Ene and Cutivireni rivers. The Ashaninka name their small settlements after the nearest river; thus, our mission was called Cutivireni, or Cuti, for short.*

Cuti grew into a peaceful, thriving community. At the time that I began my work there, in 1969, I believed that the Ashaninka had at least thirty years in which to accomplish a transition into "civilized" society, but I was wrong.

I did not foresee the encroachment of the "narcos."

I did not predict the arrival of the terrorists.

The Ashaninka had only begun to learn about twentieth-century culture when it forced itself upon them in the form of government-sponsored settlers who gradually usurped more and more of their land. Before long, some of the settlers began to cultivate the coca plant, an activity that brought an influx of fortune seekers who sought to process the coca leaves into cocaine and ship it out of the rain forest to Colombia and points north. One of the more important narco facilities was located on an island in the Ene River, south of Cuti.

For a time, the narcos and the Ashaninka managed to coexist. Then the terrorists began to arrive.

Their leader was a charismatic revolutionary named Abimael Guzmán, a professor of philosophy at the University of San Cristóbal de Huamanga. In 1969, Guzmán and his fellow professors conducted a strike in protest of the high cost of tuition, which limited educational opportunities to the elite and perpetuated the harsh class system. After this, Guzmán went underground and spent some time defining and refining his theories, which ultimately developed into the most brutal and virulent form of communism. He recruited a cadre of intelligentsia who moved into teaching posts at various institutions throughout the country and quietly spread a gospel of bloody revolution.

Peru has always been controlled by an elitist society. In ancient days, the Incas conquered the

land and forced the indigenous tribes to labor in slave conditions. The Spaniards picked up this theme when they invaded and manipulated Christian philosophy in an attempt to justify the exploitation of the "heathens." Even after Peru gained its independence from Spain, it retained a feudal style of government.

Today, although it displays the trappings of a democracy, Peru is still dominated by a social and political elite with strong ties to U.S. investment interests. The vast majority of the Peruvian population is composed of the remnants of the slaves who are today counted as free but remain in servitude to extreme poverty. This was fertile ground wherein Guzmán's vicious philosophies took root and grew.

In 1978, Guzmán resurfaced as the leader of the Communist Party of Peru for the Shining Path of José Carlos Mariátegui (the founder of Peru's first Communist party), commonly known as Sendero Luminoso. The terrorist group launched a People's War committed to the destruction of nearly every facet of Peruvian society to enable them to build a new order.

The movement grew strongest in the five *departamentos* that make up the mountainous spine of Peru. The Ene River valley, with its severe but central geography, was a natural lair. In this remote region, the terrorists established an alliance of convenience with the narcos. The terrorists offered protection; the narcos offered money. They shared a matrix of informants who had infiltrated the military, political, educational, and social systems.

The center of operations in the area, Sendero's Pentagon, was rumored to be in a maze of caves in an area called Ucherauto, near the Quimpiri River. The location was strategic. Peruvian military forces could clamp the headquarters into a vise with a three-pronged attack emanating from the Guardia Civil base in the town of Mazamari to the north, from the army base at Huancayo to the



west, and from the naval base at Luisiana to the south. But Sendero had a lifeline to the east. If pressed, the terrorists could disappear into the roadless, poorly mapped terrain of the rain forest, where the rivers worked their way toward the treacherous Vilcabamba Range and beyond—to Brazil and the Amazon.

To utilize this option, Sendero's forces would have to move north from the Quimpiri to a point where the Cutivireni merged with the Ene. From here, they would turn directly eastward, toward the haven of the rain forest, to flee along the one logical escape route—the Cutivireni River.

Only three things stood in their way: our mission, the Ashaninka, and me.

## PART ONE

### *The People*

# CHAPTER ONE

*When I arrived in 1969*, the Ene River valley was an unspoiled land of peace and natural prosperity. I planned to take my time and study the area carefully before I established a presence among the Ashaninka tribe.

After twenty-one years in Peru (eight as a student and thirteen as a small-town padre), I had finally persuaded Bishop Buenaventura León de Uriarte, of the Vicariate of San Ramón, to allow me to attempt to set up a new mission for the Ashaninka. His permission was granted with reluctance, for he found it difficult to understand why I would bother with a handful of Indians when there were multitudes of other Peruvians who also had critical needs.

I grew up in New Hampshire, of French-Canadian stock mixed with Indian blood. I was told that my father's mother was a full-blooded Iroquois. Perhaps it was this latter influence of my heritage that ultimately drew me to the Ashaninka. Even today I do not fully comprehend my motivation. All I know is that for as long as I can remember I had been driven by an insatiable curiosity regarding Native Americans.

My mother always spoke highly about the Indians who lived near her rural Michigan home. She reminisced about how, when she was small, her mother would bake bread and set a loaf on an outside windowsill. Unseen, the Indians would take the bread and leave in its place a portion of venison, or some other form of barter.

In fact, I found everything about Indians fascinating. As I had grown toward manhood I

realized that I wanted, somehow, to work with Native Americans—the more primitive, the better—and when I heard about missionary opportunities in Peru, I made up my mind to pursue an adventurous life in the South American jungle. As a side benefit, I discovered that I had a certain affection for Saint Francis.

My decision to enter a Franciscan seminary in Peru was impetuous and selfish. I was only eighteen years old. But the rewards that came to me over the years are proof that God does, indeed, work in mysterious ways.

Perhaps the bishop understood that. Or perhaps my persistence wore him down.

Whatever the reason, I had his blessing when I embarked upon a week-long journey from Lima to a remote location in the Ene River valley, San José de Cutivireni, where I knew that [an old Franciscan brother](#) was laboring to help the Ashaninka. I left the coastal capital city of Lima and by stages made my way across the Andes to Huancayo, Ayacucho, San Francisco, and finally to a mission in Sivia. There, I hired a boat, a motor, and two Quechua men. "Can you take me to see [Brother Pío](#)?" I asked.

"*Si, padre,*" one of the guides replied. Every Quechua in the valley knew about Brother Pío's tiny mission, located at the point where the Ene and Cutivireni rivers intersected.

The Quechua are of Indian stock themselves, perhaps the most numerous subclass of a group of Peruvians also known as Serranos ("People of the Altitude"). They have been exploited for centuries, first by the Incas, then by the Spaniards, and, today, by anyone with an iota of power in Peru. The only people to whom the Quechua feel superior are the indigenous tribes of the rain forest.

It was the midst of the dry season. The Ene, which rages at times, was low and sluggish. On

several occasions, the depth was insufficient for our large dugout canoe, known as a *casco*, and we had to hike along the riverbank, hauling the boat and our gear with us. As we walked we were bombarded by manta blanca ("white cloud") insects that assaulted seemingly by the billions, biting fiercely at the exposed skin of our faces, necks, arms, and legs.

It was late afternoon when we finally reached the juncture of the Ene and the Cutivireni. We grounded the dugout on the shore and began to unload my meager store of supplies.

I glanced up and saw that a group of about a dozen men and boys had appeared, silently slipping from the edge of the forest. Some were dressed in cloth robes [“*cushmas*”], in various hues of gray and brown, with contrasting vertical stripes. Others were bare-chested and clad only in shorts. A few had their faces painted with bright red pigment in a variety of designs composed of both straight and whorled lines. Each man and boy held a bow and arrow, tipped with iron-hard chontawood.

They stared at me, the gringo, with quiet wonder, but their eyes settled more warily upon my Quechua guides. The Quechua and the natives of this region suffered from a mutual distrust.

Nearly everyone in Peru calls these people Campas, and over the years, the term took on derogatory overtones. The epithet *Es un Campa* ("You are a Campa") had come to describe one who is uneducated, undesirable, and even savage: A Campa paints his face; a Campa is lazy—he does nothing but hunt and fish and eats *imoqui* (large, wormlike creatures found in the rotting wood of palm trees); you cannot communicate with a Campa, for few speak even a smattering of Spanish or Quechua. Sometimes, the even more derisive term chuncho—a difficult-to-translate word that implies dirt, filth, and scum—was applied.

But they refer to themselves as the Ashaninka, which means, simply, "the People."

The faces of this group on the riverbank reflected the delicate, light-tanned beauty of Polynesian stock, and, I supposed, their ancestry traced to the west, far across the Pacific Ocean. But it was not the Ashaninka past that concerned me; I was interested in their present and their future.

Now I was here, among them. What was I to do? What was I to say? I could not speak their language, nor could they speak mine. I requested simply, "Pío?"

The Ashaninka indicated their understanding, and motioned for me to follow them.

We entered the rain forest and immediately began a rapid, upward jaunt along a barely discernible path. At forty years of age, I considered myself to be in reasonably good shape, but I labored to keep up with the Ashaninka. These men and boys flowed along the forest floor, their bare feet easily handling the rocky terrain as I slipped and slid behind them, even though I was wearing comfortable, heavy-soled sneakers. The fabric of my shorts and T-shirt caught constantly on branches and briars, but the Ashaninka did not seem to be encumbered by their full-length robes.

There was a young man in the group, perhaps in his late teens or early twenties, who took a special interest in my presence. He tried out a few halting words of Spanish and seemed pleased to note understanding in my face.

We walked for ten or fifteen minutes before we emerged into a small clearing, where a few thatch-roofed huts with floors of hard-caked dirt composed the mission of San José de Cutivireni—Cutí, for short.

I had met Brother Pío Medina a few times over the years at meetings in Lima conducted by the province, which directed the work of all Franciscans in Peru. Pío received almost no support from either the Province or the Vicariate of San Ramón, which governed Church activities throughout central Peru. Instead, what resources Pío had scraped together came from the generosity of private

donors in Lima. I had heard that he prayed daily for an American missionary to come to Cutivireni, because he believed that a gringo would have more access to money than a Peruvian padre. Pío was of Quechuan descent, in his seventies, dark-haired short, and stocky. He greeted me with deference and enthusiasm, for he believed that I was the answer to his prayers. I did not have the heart to tell him, at the moment, that I had not yet decided to establish a base at Cuti, or that Bishop Uriarte had warned, "Don't ask me for any money."

Pío showed me around Cuti's primitive facilities, explaining that the huts were built by Ashaninka and were similar to the natives' own houses. One served as a chapel, one was a combination schoolhouse and dormitory for the few girls who studied here, and a third was where Pío and the boy students lived. The single amenity in Pío's hut was a *tushpa*, a wooden platform with shallow sides, filled with hardened clay and stones, that served as a cookstove. The staple of Pío's diet was peanuts, which he stored in a fifty-five-gallon drum and ate—raw, boiled, baked, or mashed. His bed was a pallet covered with mosquito netting.

Pío showed me where he and a few of the Ashaninka had begun work on an airstrip. They had cleared about sixty feet of land, felling huge trees with axes and digging and burning away at the stumps. There was much more work to do on the airstrip, and it was a critical venture if Cuti was ever to have access to the outside world.

Pío's subservient manner was typical of a mere brother's relationship to a padre, a hangover from the past when the brothers were regarded as little more than pious servants to the more exalted priest. But much lay below Brother Pío's servile exterior. He was, I thought, very proud of his humility. I was somewhat uncomfortable in this anachronistic role, and I pointed out to him that I had much to learn. For a time, I wished to merely observe.

Before four o'clock every morning, Pío rose from his slumbers and journeyed to the hut that served as a chapel, where he knelt before a crude altar and commenced the prayers that encompassed the bulk of his day. In the school, Pío taught the boys, and a young woman teacher (who doubled as Pío's cook and laundress) instructed the girls. Students left their families to journey here, sometimes from great distances. Even in this remote corner of the world, there was an understanding that education was vital to survival in an uncertain future. Pío taught the students a bit of Spanish, but much of their time was spent on the catechism, and he led them in interminable repetitions of the Rosary.

The old brother's philosophies left no room for compromise. If you were not baptized as a Roman Catholic, you were doomed to hell. As a Quechua, Pío was subject to the prevalent prejudices, but he rose above them. He recognized that each of the Ashaninka was endowed with an immortal soul that was in need of salvation. His solemn quest was to prevent the Ashaninka from falling into the clutches of one or another of the various groups of Protestant missionaries who “competed” for the souls of the natives. The bishop had granted him the authority to baptize, and he did so with a vengeance. At Cuti, if you wanted a new machete, all you had to do was allow Pío to baptize one of your children.

From the moment of my arrival, I was uncomfortably aware that Pío and I were at cross purposes. Pío's total quest was to convert the natives to Catholicism; mine was more complex. I wanted to delay, for as long as possible, the inevitable encroachment of civilization. But at the same time, I wanted to prepare the Ashaninka, through education, to cope with the coming changes, and I wanted to sensitize the rest of the world to their existence and their vulnerability. Perhaps most important, I simply wanted to be with them.



Before I decided on a permanent location for my work, I wanted to conduct a census of the Ashaninka population. I was in the midst of this task when a Peruvian military commander asked if I would conduct a service for his troops to celebrate the Feast of Santa Rosa. The site was Mazamari, east of Satipo, and the only way I could get there was to walk. I conducted the requested service at *the training base of a paratroop unit of the elite Guardia Civil*, known as the [Sinchis](#), and developed an immediate affinity for the troops. Seeing this, the commander asked if I would be willing to give a series of lectures. I accepted the invitation on the spot, for I reasoned that the Sinchis might be willing and able to provide help in the future to the new mission.

The paratroops listened politely to my lectures, even though they were toughened soldiers and I was a tenderfoot padre. Then one day at breakfast a Sinchi officer—a man with the intriguing name of Captain Cheyenne, who fancied himself a tough guy—asked me sarcastically, "Would you jump?"

"Why wouldn't I jump?" I responded, even as I chided myself: Mariano, what are you doing? You are forty years old.

Captain Cheyenne called out to a couple of his troops, "Set up the tower.

The training tower was situated at the bank of the Mazamari River, positioned in such a way that it seemed to overlook a gigantic void. From the top, trussed into a harness, I could see nothing, and had to accept by faith alone that there was earth somewhere below. Captain Cheyenne eyed me skeptically, which only strengthened my determination. I gritted my teeth and stepped into the void. A rush of air hit me, followed by the jarring but comforting strain of straps against my shoulder. The shock drove the air from my lungs. Almost instantly the jump was over, and I found myself dangling in air, with my feet just off the ground. I felt like a worm hanging from the end of a fishhook.

Finally, I released myself from the harness and rolled to the turf.

One of the Sinchis chided, "Sure is tougher than handing out little holy pictures, isn't it Padre?"

"How was that?" Captain Cheyenne asked.

You're not going to get the best of me, I vowed. Aloud I said, "Wonderful. Let's do it again."

After several jumps off the training tower, Captain Cheyenne, with a new measure of respect in his voice, asked, "Why don't you join our crew? We have no chaplain."

"Yeah," I agreed with a nod.

Before long, Captain Cheyenne had secured permission for me to be enrolled in the full training course; now I was to be both a padre and a paratrooper.

Months of intense effort passed. My aching muscles long remembered the innumerable practice jumps and the prebreakfast runs that were several miles long. Near the end of my training, Bishop Uriarte came for a look. Old and ill, reeking to high heaven as a result of a colostomy bag, he watched as my harness was tethered to a Jeep and I was dragged along the ground. When I had extricated myself and inventoried my bruises, the bishop grinned and asked, "Gringo, are you sure you want to go through this?" I could tell that he was proud of me; he was even more pleased when I told him that three fourths of the Sinchis were receiving the Eucharist on Sundays. I laughingly suggested that Sinchi training be added to the seminary curriculum.

At least twenty thousand Ashaninka were scattered throughout the region. Many had fled from the highlands to elude the steady encroachment of the Quechua settlers from the north, the west, and the south. My census showed that the area in and around Brother Pío's mission at Cutivireni was now the centerpoint of the Ashaninka population, and I agreed to Pío's pleas to settle there.

As soon as I arrived to take up residence, Pío introduced me to the family who lived nearby.

I recognized some of the faces I had initially encountered on the riverbank, and one of them was the young man who had attempted to communicate with me in Spanish. He said that his name was [Pepe García](#). I was delighted to see the children at play, swatting away at a featherlike toy in a game that resembled badminton. I joined their game and quickly became friends with the youngsters.

Over the course of several weeks, Pepe and I made several forays into the jungle. If we were going to build more facilities for Cuti, I wanted to study other nearby sites. I agreed with Pío that completion of the airstrip was a top priority, and I liked the area near the site. For one thing, it was far enough from the river to be a comfortable distance from the *manta blanca* plague.

Pepe's Spanish was minimal, yet he had a natural facility for understanding the nuances of my voice inflections and gestures. We communicated well, and soon Pepe agreed to lead me across the swift currents of the Cutivireni River to meet some of the families who lived on the south bank.

One of our first excursions was to the home of [Martin](#), the shaman, or medicine man. We crossed the Cuti just east of the juncture with the Ene and then moved farther east, following the riverbank. Our progress was impeded at times by fortresslike formations of immense boulders that forced us to detour into the jungle's interior. To me, there seemed to be no path through the forest, but Pepe showed me spots where others had bent twigs to signal the way.

I was panting heavily by the time Pepe stopped and pointed through a gap in the opening between trunks of huge, white-barked trees to a clearing ahead. A handful of crude huts was visible. Off to one side was a cultivated patch of yucca plants.

Following Pepe, I edged over to an invisible boundary. We stood there silently, with our backs turned toward the huts and our arms folded, waiting for the appearance of Martin.

After a time I was aware of a quiet approach from the direction of the huts. From behind us,

a voice said, "*Aviro?*" ("Do you exist?")

"*Narobe*" ("I do"), Pepe replied.

"What did you come here for?" Martin asked.

That was a deep question. I was in the early stages of a quest that could not be explained in a few words; on the other hand, the Ashaninka seemed to have a highly functional intelligence network, and Martin had probably heard about me already. Pepe simply announced that we were here for a visit.

Martin appeared to be in his mid-twenties. He was quite tall for an Ashaninka, with a muscular body, chiseled features, and intelligent eyes. He invited us to follow him. We turned and walked toward an empty hut within the small compound that was reserved for visits.

Soon after we entered the hut, a woman appeared, bearing a large, shallow half-gourd filled with a drink known as *piarintsi*, a fermented brew produced from the yucca root. She did not enter the hut but waited for Martin to step outside and accept the gourd. He returned to us, poured a portion of the liquid into a smaller gourd, and passed it to Pepe, who presented it to me. I sipped the tart, cool liquid and returned the bowl to Pepe. In turn, he drank and returned the *piarintsi* to Martin. Our host drank last. The significance of this ritual was clear; it was the Ashaninka variation on the classic scriptural theme: "The last shall be first."

Following the *piarintsi*, roasted monkey was served in a common dish. I watched Pepe and Martin carefully so that I could observe the proper etiquette, and I realized that each person was supposed to scoop a portion from the gourd and pass it on to another.

Wheat is not grown in the Ene River valley; the natives do not know what bread is. There are no grapes; wine is a foreign substance. Yet this stylized method of sharing a meal with others struck

me as genuine communion, perhaps in its purest form.

We sat there for some time, sipping *piarintsi* and talking.

Pepe and Martin chatted in their rapid, expressive tongue. Occasionally a word or two of Spanish filtered through, but most of the conversation was beyond my comprehension. Yet both of them appeared to understand me completely.

I tried to answer Martin's question: "What did you come here for?" Indeed, what was a gringo priest doing here in their world? I had come to evangelize, and what I found was a true gospel living absent of all the paraphernalia of twentieth-century accumulation that has overshadowed the true meaning of gospel teaching—Christianity in its purest form. In the words of Pope Paul VI, to evangelize meant "liberation from everything that oppresses human beings." Yet I wondered: How does that goal translate to reality in such an environment?

Pepe tried his best to explain my reasons for being there, repeating what I had told him in several conversations. It was inevitable that change would encroach upon Ashaninka life. In the short term, I hoped to slow the pace of that change. The Ashaninka lived in harmony with the land, and I wanted to be around to help them cope with pressures that would surely come and that they would just as surely fail to comprehend.

Martin was perceptive. Despite his isolation, he knew that I was right. He had been as far as Satipo, the nearest encroachment of what we called civilization. He had seen the wonders available there—shiny-bladed steel machetes that made quick work of the bark on a yucca root; pots and pans that were far more durable than gourds; axes that could easily fell the hard-wooded chonta tree; short-wave radios that could broadcast strange dialogues from faraway places; bolts of cloth; hard candies and Chiclets for the children; and that most wonderful of hunting tools, the 16-gauge

shotgun.

Martin had also noted that Satipo was populated largely by Quechuas. What he had difficulty in understanding was the inevitable fact that the Quechuas would continue to encroach upon Ashaninka territory.

*If* change was coming, and *if* I hoped to prepare the Ashaninka for it, how would I accomplish this?

Pepe communicated my answer in a word that Martin understood: education.

## CHAPTER TWO

*I* told [Brother Pío](#) that I was going to the Summer Institute of Linguistics, located at Lake Yarinacocha near Pucallpa, in the northeastern portion of the country, not far from the Brazilian border. My purpose was to recruit a teacher. The institute, affiliated with the Wycliffe Bible Translators, had been established more than twenty years earlier and, in my opinion, offered the most effective educational program to aid the Indian populations of Peru. It had studied over sixty native language groups and hundreds of dialects in an attempt to bring education and Christian teaching to the various tribes. The institute enrolled natives from numerous areas of the country, taught them Spanish, schooled them in trades, and sent them back home to teach others. Bill Kindberg, a faculty member of the institute, had translated the entire New Testament into the phonetic language of the Ashaninka.

Brother Pío's response to my suggestion was "No! They are Protestants!"

"The terms *Protestant* and the *devil* are not synonymous," I responded.

But to Brother Pío, they were. For years, the people of the Summer Institute had been trying to establish a presence at Cuti, but Pío would have none of it. Now, he dropped to his wrinkled old knees and wept like a baby. "You are Satan personified if you ally with the Protestants," he announced.

Ignoring Pío, I journeyed to Pucallpa and invited the institute to provide us with a teacher. They responded by sending a full-blooded Ashaninka named Miguel and his wife, Natasha.

It was gratifying to see how many of the Ashaninka wished to take advantage of the opportunity. Our school was quickly filled with students, including many adults. Pío accepted their presence grudgingly.

I enjoyed the company of the children immensely. As with children all over the world, one of their main activities was to emulate the adults. I could sit and watch for hours as they painstakingly painted their faces, fashioning intricate designs from the oily, brilliant red achiote berry and an equally vivid black pigment produced from an assortment of roots. They stored the dye in small vials of hollow bamboo reeds and applied it with care, using small twigs as paintbrushes and glancing into bits of mirrors somehow acquired from the outside world. An Ashaninka could tell if another was happy or sad, belligerent or flirtatious, simply by noting the design and colors of the face painting. I decided that this custom was not much different from the way we adorn ourselves in so-called civilized society.

As soon as they could walk and talk, boys hunted birds with tiny bows and arrows, and the girls helped their mothers process the yucca root. Young boys chopped firewood; young girls carried huge baskets full of yucca on their backs, held in place by straps across their foreheads. An Ashaninka parent rarely had to administer discipline; childhood disobedience seldom occurred. They were youngsters, their laughter, when they romped naked in the forest rivers, was shrill, sharp, free—and angelic.

The boys and I loved to spar, shuffling our feet in the dirt and raining mock blows upon one another. Often, in the clearing around the mission, I enjoyed the clamorous excitement of their football games; throw a soccer ball in amidst a group of Ashaninka boys, and they will amuse themselves for hours.



One morning a young fellow arrived and announced that he was going to school. I knew him from some of my visits across the river, and I said, "That is great, Justin."

I followed him into the schoolhouse hut and watched him march up to Miguel. "What is your name?" Miguel asked.

"Carbólico," the youngster replied.

I was confused. I was sure that this was Justin.

Miguel laughed at my consternation and explained that the Ashaninka guard their identity closely, for if an enemy learned one's personal name, he could tell it to the shaman, who might cast a harmful spell. This presented the Ashaninka with a unique problem, for in Peru, everyone is required to provide a Christian name and the surnames of both parents for all documents. Without such documents, one could not enroll in school, vote—or even purchase a bus ticket. The Ashaninka were not about to reveal their true names to a government official, so they simply adopted "civilized" names that they heard elsewhere: Juan, Pedro, Natasha, Greenwood, Taylor, Johnson. Such identities were transitory, and would be changed at whim.

Brother Pío theorized that Justin had heard, somewhere, of carbolic soap and decided that he liked the name. "Tomorrow he might be Hermano or Gertrude," Pío said with a chuckle. "Out here"—he waved his hand toward the jungle—"we even have a Hitler and a Stalin."

I did not foresee a mission in the traditional sense, one that would evolve into a town with all the amenities and all the problems that accompany them. My long-term goal was to persuade the government of Peru to preserve the area around Cuti as a national park, immune from further settlement. Thus protected, it would retain its unblemished beauty and remain safe from those who

would disrupt the natural harmonies of life in the valley. (Parque Nacional de Cutivireni—Plan Piloto para América Latina, an idea that I had appropriated from the Pan American Union, suggested that Cuti could be used as a model program for all of South America.) One critic scoffed, "What do you want to do—create a zoo for the Ashaninka?" I explained my concept: The mission itself would not be part of the public lands. In the surrounding jungle, the Ashaninka could live their lives as they always had. Those who chose to could come to the mission to learn language skills and a trade. They would have options.

I wrote scores of letters to various government ministries and, over time, built a base of support. Money trickled in for education and health care.

But more help came from the private sector. Brother Pío told me about the Pardo family in Lima, who had provided considerable support for the early work at Cuti. Like most of Peru's upper class, the Pardos could trace their genealogy back almost to the time of the conquistadores, both in Peru and Mexico. At one time, the family firm was one of the country's largest producers of sugarcane and also owned a number of subsidiary companies, including newspapers and textile mills. The businesses were managed by a group of family members, most of whom had been educated in England by the Benedictines.

My first chance to meet the family was when Juan Pardo and his wife Mari came for a visit, bringing along their friends Graham and Nancy Curtis; British-born Graham was a broker for Lloyds of London in Lima. Brother Pío asked if I would take a [\*casco\*](#) to meet our guests upriver at an experimental farm in Pichari, run by the Benedictines.

I was impressed. The Pardos were leaders in Peru's tiny elite society, and the Curtises were prominent in the business world, yet they fit right into the simple austerity of jungle life. Mari,

accustomed to being waited on by a retinue of servants, cooked dinner over a hot fire that spewed smoke in her face; Nancy pitched in eagerly. They uttered no words of complaint about the giant cockroaches that lived in the thatching of our houses, and all four of our guests used the primitive outhouse facilities without flinching.

The visit was the beginning of a deep and lasting friendship. From then on, whenever I journeyed to Lima, I visited the Pardos and Curtises. They, in turn, introduced me to other members of their social set, who, over the course of many years, helped finance many of our mission activities.

To the Ashaninka, I stressed the point that Cuti was not my mission but our mission, and anything we accomplished, we would do together. I told them that I had friends in Lima who were willing to donate money; that money was not mine, but ours.

Through discussions with [Pepe](#), [Martin](#), and others, we decided that the first priority was to complete the airstrip that Pío had started so that we might ferry in supplies from the outside world. The process took about a year. Using hand axes and push-pull saws and the strong backs of the natives, we felled the trees, burned the enormous stumps, and filled in the holes with dirt and rocks, which we then tamped down. Each small section of the airstrip required an inordinate amount of labor—but labor was our major asset.

Working on the airstrip was backbreaking toil and torturously slow, and I finally decided to journey to Mazamari to ask my friends at the [Sinchi](#) base to assist us. There, I was able to convince about twenty of them to return to the mission with me, and we decided to go in by parachute.

As the Sinchis' old DC-3 circled over the partially completed airstrip at an altitude of little more than a thousand feet, the always-curious Ashaninka heard the roar of the engine and gathered, looking skyward. One by one, the Sinchis and I jumped from the plane and began our descent.

When the Ashaninka saw me spiral to the earth, drop, roll, and gather my fatigue-patterned parachute, many of them fell to their knees, holding their sides, laughing in delight and surprise. The middle-aged padre, who was a lackluster hunter and a barely adequate fisherman, had garnered a bit of machismo respect.

The Sinchis were a great help to us. They used dynamite to extract huge tree roots that protruded from the surface of the airstrip, and they added their own strong backs to our assortment of workers.

When the airstrip was finally finished, we registered it in Lima. Government officials came out to measure it to make sure that it met their bureaucratic requirements. Then they pronounced. ' that it legally belonged to the government of Peru—although the cost of its upkeep would be our responsibility.

We did not care about the ownership, for we had our link to the outside world. Now we could fly in food, medicine, blankets, radios, and construction supplies from Satipo and even faraway Lima—not to mention cigarettes and an occasional bottle of Scotch.

During this same period, several Ashaninka families moved closer, building their huts in a small cluster at the far end of the airstrip; gradually the settlement took on the appearance of a small town. Martin ministered as best he could to the medical needs of the natives, using traditional herbal remedies; one treatment consisted of playfully blowing tobacco smoke on the head of the sufferer.

Ashaninka culture does not generally require the presence of a strong leader, but each tiny settlement is more or less under the direction of one man, and at Cuti, that gradually became Pepe's role; I thought of him as the mayor, and, indeed, he was entrusted with the responsibility of keeping the paperwork that the government required, such as birth certificates and voter-registration rolls.

Neither he nor any of his people knew what the papers signified, nor did they care, but I thought Pepe comprehended when I told him that he had to keep the papers in a safe place.

The daily routine of the Ashaninka was clearly defined. The men hunted and fished and carried the news from family to family. They hunted only for survival, and they often had to cover vast distances in search of their prey. The men considered themselves to be the providers and patriarchs, but the women were the ones who held the society together. When a man and woman married, the man was generally drawn in as a part of the woman's family.

The Ashaninka cultivated yucca much as they bred children. Yucca was the staple of the diet, the staff of life. It was the man who cleared the land—at least two acres per family—and it was the man who thrust the yucca shoots into the ground. But it was the woman who weeded, nurtured, cultivated, and harvested.

Yucca root, when baked, filed, or boiled, is highly nutritious, as evidenced by the wiry but muscular stature of the young men and their preference for plump-fleshed women. Yucca was most prized as the primary ingredient of *piarintsi*, and making the brew was a daily ritual. Women sat next to baskets piled high with yucca root. With razor-sharp knives and machetes, they slashed along the lengths of roots and peeled off the bark. They chopped the roots into small pieces and pitched them into pots of water sitting over open wood fires. Once boiled, the yucca was mashed and worked into a paste. Women and girls chewed mouthfuls of this mixture, like cud, and spat them back into the pot. The brew was then allowed to ferment. As they worked, the women gossiped about the latest (usually imaginary) love triangle. The natives drank gallons of *piarintsi* every day, and this promoted an abandoned, exaggerated laughter, which at times continued until the wee hours of the morning.

During my occasional trips to Satipo, I boarded at the Franciscan parish house, located on the north side of the town's central plaza. Satipo was a conduit between Lima and the primitive rain forest. In the shops surrounding the plaza, salt, sugar, axes, flashlights, shotguns, transistor radios, and other cherished goods were swapped for the commerce of the jungle: cacao beans, coffee, oranges, bananas, beautiful, lush papayas, and lumber.

At the parish, I could always count on a friendly greeting from Soledad, a lovely young Ashaninka woman who had lived with and worked for the nuns in Satipo since she was a child. Her name meant "Solitary" or "Alone one." On one of my visits, Soledad was nowhere to be found. When I asked about her, the nuns related the story in hushed, seemingly reluctant tones. Soledad was pregnant, they announced, and despite her years of diligent service, they had been forced to ask her to leave. They told me that the father was [Rigoberto](#). I knew him. He was a reed-slim, high-strung, somewhat restless young Ashaninka man.

The nuns assumed that I would agree with their action. With lowered eyes they muttered, "What would people have said? What would people have thought?"

I raged, "You kicked her out on the streets at the time when she needs you the most!"

I took my anger to the streets of Satipo and was able to locate Soledad. Her sad eyes suddenly brightened when I told her that we would welcome her at Cuti.

Soledad moved back to the jungle and became my housekeeper and cook. In time, she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl.

[Matías Miranda](#) left the Franciscan settlement upriver at Sivia to join us at Cuti. He was a genial young man, quiet and intelligent. With a detached grin on his face, he puffed on a cigarette

held from underneath, in the European manner, as he listened to me tell a group of Ashaninka, "Don't ever be ashamed of your customs. You received them from God. You should be proud of them. Tasorensi does not want you to change; He only wants to love you. The Ashaninka have no external liturgy, but they very much believe in God, whom they call either Tasorensi or Pava. To me, the image of Tasorensi, the white-tailed hummingbird, was far more beautiful than the melancholy dove of classic Christian tradition. Matías told me in passable Spanish that he understood and appreciated my words.

Matías's young wife, Olga, came to work at the mission, helping wherever she was needed, handling basic tasks of cleaning and cooking, working side by side with Soledad. Her broad, open smile was warm and friendly, and her wide-set eyes held a mischievous glint. Shining black hair hung past her shoulders, framing a face that epitomized the beauty of the lightly bronzed Ashaninka. I enjoyed teasing Olga, frequently imploring her to run off to Cubeja and marry me. Cubeja was a particularly foreboding terrain that Pepe had told me about, higher up in the mountains. From Cuti, one could see Cubeja and its majestic waterfalls, and I had developed a minor obsession about visiting it. Pío warned me, "Nobody has been able to penetrate that jungle. It is dangerous." He said that the journey, even for the hardy Ashaninka, involved a full week's trek across precipitous cliffs.

When I teased Olga, she returned the banter. "You are no good for me," she countered. "Matías hunts and brings home the fish, the monkey, the tapir, and the boar. You—you are good for nothing." Still, she could never hold back a giggle as she served the whole baked yucca root. When a woman presented the yucca root to a man, it was an agreement to marriage; the Ashaninka recognized it as an oversized phallic symbol.

One day Matías, during the height of passion, abandoned his usual temperate behavior and bit deeply

into Olga's nipple. She retaliated by smashing him over the head with the butt of a shotgun, then ran to Brother Pío for treatment of her wounds. A few minutes later I walked in to find that Pío had attached a wad of cotton to a two-foot stick, dipped it into iodine, and was attempting to swab the wound at long distance. With his head turned away, he jabbed in the direction of the bare breast.

I could not resist teasing the pious old man. "Pío, what do you think you are treating there, a bomb?" I chided. "Here is your opportunity. Make the best of it. This could be your last chance—make the most of it. I promise you, it will not explode!"

Almost all the Ashaninka had been pushed into the Ene River valley by encroaching civilization. Most came from the various nearby river regions, but others were born and raised higher in the mountains, where life was harsh; they tended to be more aggressive. Such was the case with old [Gregorio](#) and his extended, rambunctious clan.

They had lived in a region called the Gran Pajonal, northeast of Satipo, a treeless plateau centered in a wedge of land between the Tambo and Perené rivers, and we shared similar feelings about the two other Franciscan missions in central Peru, ostensibly serving the Ashaninka. Gregorio and I, in our separate ways, had found them disappointing. Gregorio had been born and raised near the mission at Obenteni in the Gran Pajonal. At the time that the mission was established, the Gran Pajonal was the center of Ashaninka culture, but the missionaries had brought about radical change. The plateau was abundant with natural grasses, and the good brothers of Obenteni reasoned that cattle would flourish there. Considering the Ashaninka to be relatively worthless, the missionaries had encouraged the migration of "good Catholic" Quechua settlers, who established their herds and requisitioned portions of the land. Some Ashaninka were employed—or coerced—as cheap labor,



but most gradually migrated, following the Ene south toward more isolated regions. The mission at Obenteni flourished—producing, for example, Peru's finest coffee—but it no longer served the Ashaninka.

Gregorio's clan had moved near the second, newer mission at Puerto Ocopa, midway between Satipo and Obenteni. Originally founded as a refuge for abandoned Ashaninka children, the mission was now under the direction of Father Teodorico Castillo, a man of extraordinary energy and dedication who almost never allowed himself a respite from his work. Father Castillo, who truly loved and respected the Ashaninka, was committed to the belief that the Ashaninka had to assimilate into modern society—the sooner the better. While this sounded like a realistic approach, I could not help but wonder: Do we have to be so realistic? Do the Ashaninka *have* to change overnight? Must we arbitrarily impose our culture upon them? Why can't we just accept them, and love them as one more variation in God's glorious world?

Father Castillo was a good man, and he meant well when he contended, "There is no choice. Is it fair to give them false hope? Must we prolong the agony? The Western culture will take over. It is inevitable.

I was overcome by the complexity of the issue. It is a simple thing to provide an Ashaninka with a manufactured shirt, but then, how was he supposed to keep it clean? The traditional, loose-flowing *cushma* did not gather dirt and grime like a shirt; one could clean it by pounding it against a rock on the riverbank. But a shirt needed to be laundered, and for that, one needed soap. And what happened when a button was ripped loose? One needed a needle and thread, and the ability to sew. Each tiny advance brought with it additional problems. Many of the Ashaninka at Puerto Ocopa were out of their element and, to me, appeared disoriented.

After a series of altercations with the rigid Father Castillo, Gregorio and his family appeared at Cuti and provided a fascinating study in the Ashaninka's struggle between the past and the present. Gregorio was older than I, but he could hike barefoot along the mountain trails with the agility and energy of a youngster. Puffing calmly on his pipe, he regarded the world through the knowing eyes of experience. I affectionately called his wife La Vieja, "the Old Lady."

He had five sons and five daughters. One son was in Lima, but Nicolás, Teodoro, Juan, and Pablo came with him to Cuti. Of the sons, Nicolás was at once the most tempestuous and promising. Father Castillo's mission, despite operating with very limited resources, had sent him (and several other Ashaninka) to trade school, in Huancayo and Lima. Nicolás was clearly proud of his educational status, and advertised it by a preference for store-bought shorts and T-shirts instead of the traditional cushma. He enjoyed flashing his wristwatch. Most of the Ashaninka played *fútbol* barefoot, but Nicolás wore cleated shoes. The strict Catholic education had done little to suppress his colorful vocabulary, and he taught me many useful swearwords, in both Spanish and Ashaninka.

Of the daughters, I grew closest to Cecilia, the most levelheaded and articulate of the bunch; and I kept a watchful eye on her sister Claudia an attractive young woman, high-strung and full of intrigue, who came up only to my shoulders in height.

They were a fiery group, but I grew to like them immensely, and they served to remind me that the Ashaninka are no different from the rest of us. They, too, are subject to the seven capital sins.

Shortly after the family's arrival, Claudia's husband, Alejandro, died of tuberculosis, leaving his widow in what, to an Ashaninka woman, is a desperate limbo. Who would hunt and fish for her? Who would plant the yucca?

My first hint of Claudia's plight came during a visit to Father Castillo's mission at Puerto

Ocopa. The nuns drew me aside and asked, in excited whispers, if I knew what was going on between Claudia and Pedro.

Pedro, a Quechua from Satipo, was a talented mechanic who had come to work with us. The Ashaninka could tolerate the presence of a Quechua in their midst, especially if he pulled his weight and worked for the good of the community, as Pedro did—but it was rare for them to socialize.

The nuns' question puzzled me on two levels. As far as I knew, there was nothing going on between Pedro and Claudia. But even more perplexing was the efficiency of the mysterious long-distance rumor mill. I assured the inquisitive sisters that their concern was ill founded, but they were insistent. "They are having an affair," one of them declared. Their tongue-clucking curiosity did not surprise me. Perhaps the celibate life-style helps to create the tittering ambivalence that so often accompanies matters relating to the flesh.

When I returned to Cuti, I asked Pedro if the accusation was true. He denied it, and I had no reason to doubt him. I let the matter drop.

But that very evening Pedro came to me in panic and confessed that he was, indeed, involved with Claudia. Now the rumor had spread through Cuti and Claudia's father, Gregorio, had threatened to kill him. Trembling with fear, Pedro asked if he could refuge in my house. Somewhat confused, I let him in. In matters of sexual dalliance, the Ashaninka blame the woman, not the man, considering the female to be responsible for the decision to acquiesce. So why was Gregorio angry with Pedro? Perhaps he was upset that his daughter had taken up with a Quechua, but was more to it?

Almost before I knew what was happening, Gregorio and several of his sons surrounded my house, demanding that I turn over Pedro. This is trouble! I thought. I immediately got on the radio

to Satipo and arranged for an airplane to evacuate the frightened young man. Then I grabbed my pistol and went outside to Gregorio.

"Cool down," I demanded, making sure that Gregorio took note of the gun at my side. He began to protest, but I shouted him, down. "I'm going to count to ten," I warned. "Then I'm going to start shooting." The group dispersed, but I knew that they were very angry with me.

By the next morning, Gregorio was calmer, but he was still argumentative. He confronted me, claiming that I had no right to turn his daughter over to Pedro.

"I did no such thing," I told him. "Who told you that?"

"Claudia told me," Gregorio insisted.

Now I had a better understanding of Gregorio's wrath. He was upset not only with Pedro but with me! I knew that I had to straighten out this mess quickly. I sent for Claudia, and under the stem eye of her father, she reluctantly admitted that she had lied about my involvement. "I was scared," she said.

Gregorio took his daughter off to settle their differences, and I tried to center my attention on the morning mass. Ironically, this was December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

No sooner had I finished saying the mass when another irate father called Cristóbal appeared, with fire in his eyes and a bow and arrow in his hands. "Pedro has been sleeping with my daughter," he accused.

I grabbed the weapon from him and was about to speak when I heard the welcome sound of the airplane that I had summoned the day before. With dispatch, I whisked Pedro to the airstrip and sent him and his libido back to Satipo. A Spanish expression flashed through my mind: If your shorts were made of metal, they'd always be ringing.

The Pardos offered to provide the mission with a new Ford tractor, which was disassembled and shipped to Cuti on about fifteen separate flights. The toughest task was to transport the tires, which had to be squeezed out of shape in order to fit into a Cessna 206. Juan and Mari Pardo came along for the delivery, bringing a mechanic named Salazar to reassemble the parts.

The Ashaninka—especially Matías—watched this procedure with intense curiosity. In their own way, the Ashaninka were very clever with machinery. They could not decipher the pictures and diagrams in an instruction manual, but if they had the opportunity to watch a mechanic at work, they could copy the procedure immediately.

I was extremely grateful for the gift of the tractor, but on a daily basis, I did not wish to give the Ashaninka anything; I wanted them to learn the concept of earning it. I declared that there was plenty of work around the mission, and that anyone could ask for a paying job and get it. Our wages were not grand, but they were fair—comparable to what a laborer could earn in Satipo. Nicolás took advantage of my offer and proved to be an excellent carpenter, when he chose to work, but I could only count on that for a couple of days; if I pleaded with him, I might keep him on the job for a full week. Then he disappeared into the jungle to hunt and fish, and I would not see him again for weeks.

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One day a boy about twelve years old appeared at the mission and announced that his family had moved into the area so that he could go to school. He was a scrawny kid, but dressed neatly in shirt and pants. Something was obviously wrong with his right eye; the iris was injured, its color blurring into the white background. When I asked about it, he shrugged and told me he had had an

accident with a machete many years ago. He had no vision in the eye. He was called **Roy**.

**Roy** was nearly a full-blooded Ashaninka, but there was a trace of Quechua on his father's side. His parents lived quite far from the mission, so he took up residence with us. Ashaninka children frequently strike out on their own at an early age, but Roy's story was particularly poignant. I had learned from Father Castillo that, to the Ashaninka, loss of a body part is one of life's worst tragedies. Without an eye, Roy was considered less than a man. His ability to hunt was diminished. Other Ashaninka tended to shun him, not out of malice but because of the Ashaninka view of reality and practicality. Why bother with a man who has one eye when there are so many who are whole? Roy had come to regard the world, through his one eye, as a bleak and lonely place. Education was clearly his best opportunity to improve his lot, and at the mission we were able to offer him acceptance and a measure of dignity.

I hired Roy as a sort of houseboy, and he performed his work conscientiously. He also quickly distinguished himself as one of our better students. All of the natives possessed a knack for retaining detail, and Roy proved to be one of the best. He was able to recall minutiae at will.

Roy's father, Ponce, helped me to understand the Ashaninka concept of ownership. On one occasion he arrived at the mission to present me with a *motelo*, a land turtle. This was a large one, more than a foot in diameter, and as I looked forward to a delicious stew of meat mixed with green bananas, I asked Ponce, "How much do I owe you?"

He was perplexed. "Nothing," he replied. "I found it in the jungle."

I came to understand: Anything that comes from the jungle is provided by Tasorensi, so how could anyone own it? A man's battered machete was his own; a woman's tin cup was her own. But

the notion of possession extended only to man-made objects. What came from the land was to be shared by all.

Gradually I realized that, to the Ashaninka, working for money was a means to a specific end—to buy something tangible. But no self-respecting Ashaninka man would work a paying job in order to sustain his family. Food came from the jungle—one hunted for food, or fished for it, or harvested it. If you could not feed your family by tapping the resources of the jungle, then what kind of man were you? Nature provided lumber for building and thatching for roofs. Working for money was merely a way to secure luxuries.

This was why Nicolás chose to work at the mission for only a few days at a time. A wage was unimportant compared to the gifts that Tasorensi provided in the jungle.

Miguel, our first teacher, decided to relocate to be closer to the family of his wife, Natasha. Before he left, he recommended a young man by the name of [Mario Zumáeta](#) as his replacement, and Mario's arrival proved to be one of the mission's greatest blessings. He was from the Atalaya area and, like Miguel, had received his training at the Summer Institute. His blood was a mixture of Ashaninka and Shipibo. Shipibo mothers tie boards across the foreheads of their babies in order to produce what they consider to be an attractive flattened brow, and behind Mario's level forehead was a sharp mind and a photographic memory. He was of medium height, strong, and athletic, a handsome specimen of a native man who was equally comfortable hunting with a bow or scrawling Spanish phrases onto a blackboard.

In Peru, a teacher is provided with a single tome, titled *The Encyclopedia*, containing the entire curriculum: Spanish, arithmetic, literature, history, and science. Because of budget limitations, many classrooms had only one copy of *The Encyclopedia*, and the teacher read from it as the

students copied the words verbatim. Mario went far beyond this. During math class, for example, he stood at the blackboard, detailing the basics of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division; in turn, each student came up front and worked the numbers. Exhibiting incredible patience, Mario did not stop until he was sure that the student had grasped the concept.

He enjoyed the children's sense of play and incorporated it into his teaching. One of his favorite lessons was to re-create the solar system in the classroom. One child was the sun, another, the moon. Others were the various planets. Mario sent them into their proper orbits, and the classroom spun with laughter.

Roy wanted to become a teacher, and he studied Mario's techniques. With a flashlight and a papaya, he illustrated the action of the sunlight on various parts of the earth.

More than any of the others, Mario understood why I was here, and he, too, wanted to help his people adjust to what were, at the time, only vaguely definable threats. He developed into a valued friend.

After a few years at the mission, Mario married Gregorio's daughter Cecilia, and they were eventually blessed with a beautiful baby girl whom they called Yaní. Mario developed a symbiotic relationship with his brother-in-law Nicolás. His calm demeanor and Nicolás's fiery spirit complemented one another. And the two were clearly our best *fútbol* players.

Some of the Ashaninka tried their hand at growing cacao—the chocolate plant—and shipped the beans to Satipo for sale. Over time, more and more natives adopted simple farming techniques, *they had a cash crop*.

The government of Peru, as part of a general program of earthquake relief provided us with an



entire medical clinic. The prefabricated structure was flown in on a military transport plane and assembled by government workers.

A community was taking shape, and I surveyed the land carefully, seeking to build future structures closer to water; I envisioned hydroelectric power.

One day, as I was swimming in the Mamiri River *with some of the* natives, I glanced up and saw, high on the far bank, a luster of trees, lush with bright pink blossoms. "Why don't we go up there?" I suggested. We scaled the steep slope of the riverbank to find a plateau that appeared perfect for building additional facilities. From here, there was a spectacular view of Cubeja and its cascading waterfalls. "This is it!" I declared.

The natives cleared the land, and we erected a huge building that we subdivided into a mechanical workshop, a generator storage room, and a lumber mill. We also constructed a guesthouse, a mission house, a sort of barracks for workers, a new school, and another building that served as a sort of town hall.

Finally we established a cooperative store, where the Ashaninka d bring in their cacao crops and receive a fair price. We exchanged the cacao for cash rather than credit, for I wanted the Ashaninka to learn how to deal with money. They also brought in few handmade items, such as *cushmas* and necklaces made of monkey teeth, for export to Satipo. In older times—and still in the most remote areas—the *cushma* was made from the bark of a special tree—called *kiriniroki* or *potoo*—that could be worked into a coarse fiber. But the Ashaninka in and around Cuti had learned :be wonders of modern cloth. An Ashaninka man would only wear a *cushma* that was handmade by his wife—or perhaps his mother. A woman harvested cotton from tall jungle stalks, fashioned it into thread, wove it on rustic looms into a long rectangular cloth, and died it in a traditional dark,

vertical stripe pattern. The final touch was to cut a V neck in the middle. To dress, the man merely pulled the V neck over his head. A man was also expected to provide *cushmas* for his wife and daughters, but he would never make them himself. Somehow, he had to earn enough money to order the cloth from Satipo. He then presented this to his wife for completion. A woman's *cushma* featured a long slit across the shoulders, providing easy access for breast-feeding. We soon discovered a market in handmade *cushmas*, which we exported to Lima, where they had become popular.

I used the store as a teaching device; frequently I purposely shortchanged a native to see if he would notice. If he did not, I shouted at him as he turned to leave, "Caramba! Count your money. You must learn to protect yourself." This was a difficult and long struggle, for the Ashaninka were simply too trusting.

The progress of the cooperative made recurrent trips to Satipo necessary, and I developed a relationship with several bush pilots whom I could contact by shortwave radio. One or another of them was generally available whenever I needed to get into town.

It was in Satipo that I met Fortunato Cárdenas. He was of Quechua extraction, strong as an ox, a mason by trade, and in need of a job. Since he claimed to be an expert in construction, I decided to give him a try, and he accepted my job offer with a beaming grin and a firm handshake. At Cuti, Fortunato quickly developed a respect for the native way of life. He may have been a Quechua, but he was extremely loyal to the needs of our mission and of the Ashaninka in general.

As the mission grew and prospered, more and more Ashaninka settled nearby, on the other side of the airstrip. Under Pepe's direction, the community took on aspects of a town, laid out in small blocks of houses.

Matías's brother-in-law, [Capitán](#), was one of the key builders. The mission had sent him to carpentry school in Huancayo, and now he used his skills in the developing town. He was one of the taller Ashaninka and walked with a stiff-backed aristocratic gait that belied his meek and gentle personality. In Capitán, I saw a flash of affection uncommon in the nondemonstrative Ashaninka. He married one of the most beautiful women in town and when God blessed the union with a baby girl, Capitán could be seen, on occasion, cradling her lovingly in his arms. This is not the way with an Ashaninka father, but on Capitán it played well.

Each morning I walked to the settlement and strolled among the people. Quite often, Capitán's wife presented me with a gift—a bunch of green bananas or a papaya.

The Ashaninka were enthralled by the corrugated aluminum sheeting that we used as roofing on the mission buildings. To them it became a visible sign of progress to replace the thatching on their huts with this sturdy imported material. Before long, the cooperative was doing a respectable business, trading two-by-six-foot panels of roofing material in exchange for cacao crops. About forty sheets were necessary to complete the roof of one hut; the mission supplied twenty, but the natives had to purchase the remainder. I watched them develop, very slowly, a sense of pride in ownership.

Periodically I made the mistake of attempting to train them toward serious farming and husbandry. A herd of cows was a complete failure, for the Ashaninka were afraid of the large animals, and to complicate matters, the cattle were attacked by plagues of vampire bats. The calves were especially vulnerable. Once, I brought in a few pigs so that the natives could learn to raise them as a reliable source of food. But the Ashaninka were not good at the necessary tasks. One has to raise corn to feed the hogs, and one has to see to their regular, if minimal, needs. To the

Ashaninka, it made much more sense to shoot the wild boar that Tasorensi had already provided.

We were more successful when we brought in a supply of chickens. They flourished in this environment—for some reason, there was a lack of disease and parasites—and we soon had eggs in overabundance. The schoolchildren often began their day with a breakfast of hard-boiled eggs served by Mario. On holidays, we could cook a feast featuring twenty-five or thirty birds. Following this success, we obtained a few ducks, and they thrived also. But I learned quickly that I did not care much for the eggs, and the ducks adopted the annoying habit of wandering about the compound, leaving their droppings at the precise points where I was sure to step on them.

Through the years, I saw the Ashaninka develop a healthy sense of pride in what they could accomplish. Their children gained an education. Each family had an acre or two of cacao under cultivation. Their huts were covered with aluminum roofing. A few of the men had shotguns. Most of the women wore store-bought panties; the men loved jockey shorts. In sum, they had been introduced in a careful fashion to a handful of the conveniences of modern life. They had accepted and rejected others and managed, so far, to retain their unique identity.

But our progress did not come without a price. On the negative side, I could see that the Ashaninka were slowly learning certain unfortunate traits, such as envy and greed. On occasion, there was even an incidence of petty theft—behavior previously unknown here.

Extraordinary pressures were coming to bear on our mission. and the Ashaninka were caught between competing philosophies. I confronted this dilemma when I arranged for Roy to become the first Ashaninka ever to be fitted with a glass eye. One of our benefactors agreed to help, and Roy and I flew to Lima for an appointment with a Dr. Gonzalez, recommended as one of the best available eye surgeons.

During the trip I stopped to visit my provincial, the elected head of our province of Franciscans. When I told him why I was in town, he had to restrain himself from laughing out loud. "Why do you want to get him a glass eye?" he asked. "This is so ridiculous. You say you don't want to change the natives, yet you want to spend money on a glass eye for a boy who lives in the jungle;"

I explained how critical it could be to Roy's future. The glass eye would improve his appearance greatly, and he would no longer be, to the Ashaninka, visibly less than a man.

The provincial listened with a dubious expression on his face, which seemed to say: crazy gringo.

The chapel was to be the crowning glory of Cuti: Fortunato and Roy fashioned a beautiful altar out of an inverted tree root, flattening and polishing the top to a high sheen. it was magnificent in its simplicity.

Some of my colleagues viewed theology mainly as an intellectual discipline; the primary task was to convince the nonbeliever of the truth of the Christian faith. In my view, the purpose of theology was to respond to the conditions in which human beings live. I never imposed my own religious customs on the Ashaninka; as far as I was concerned, they shared my beliefs already. I never invited them to church; they came anyway. I never proclaimed that they had to be baptized, but Pío had paved the way long ago with his well-meant bribes. I did not coerce them into receiving communion, but they did so, willingly.

One day I said to Mario, "I think I'll wear a *cushma* at service." The native robe was in some ways similar to my floor-length alb. What did it matter that an alb was always white and a *cushma* is dark, usually brown? On the following Sunday I selected one of the *cushmas* from our store,

donned it, and placed my stole on top of it.

I was surprised when, not long after that, Cecilia and Mario appeared at my house, bearing gifts. Cecilia gave me a *cushma* that she had made herself. Smiling at her side, Mario then gave me a beautiful neckpiece made of multicolored stones. In the center, held by two short lengths of twine, was a beaded square pendant, about three inches across. The background was composed of white, violet, and blue stones. The foreground, in bright red stones, was the shape of the cross.

Practically every morning, at about six o'clock, I could count on finding Mario at the altar, waiting for the communion wafer. After he received the Host, he stepped back to his place, pulled the wafer from his mouth, broke off a small piece, and gave it to his daughter Yaní.

This was consistent with the Ashaninka's basic concepts. What did it matter that the Church had established certain rules and traditions? Tasorensi had provided a world full of blessings, which were freely available to every man, woman, and child. Sharing the bounty was a natural inclination.

Such behavior came naturally and was beyond discussion. In fact, the Ashaninka did not spend much time thinking about Tasorensi, because God is good. The one you have to worry about is the devil.

## PART TWO

### *The Poison*

## CHAPTER THREE

*The first Quechua* settlers arrived in the Cuti area in the late 1970s, coming down from the Andes in search of more fertile ground. There were only a few, but I knew that they were harbingers.

President Fernando Belaúnde Terry of Peru promoted the idea of opening the country's vast inland areas to the populations of the mountain towns. In theory the plan had merit but it was implemented with inadequate preparation and absolutely no concern for the natives. I reasoned that before you bring an avalanche of people to the rain forest, you must first prepare the people who are already there. The Ashaninka lived off the land and therefore needed vast areas to support them. How could you take away those lands until you first trained the natives to survive in a more restricted area? To do otherwise was to foment a classic breeding ground for tension.

For a variety of reasons, the Ashaninka had little regard for the settlers. They considered the Quechua to be unclean. Most Ashaninka bathe several times daily in the swift rivers of the rain forest; the only odor they carried was an aura of smoke embedded in their [\*cushmas\*](#), from the fires in their huts. In contrast, the Quechua, accustomed to the frigid climate of the altitude, seldom bathed. Almost all Quechua chew the coca leaf, which produces a constant spittle, and the women's long skirts frequently smelled of urine. But the primary reason that the Ashaninka disliked the Quechua was that historically, when the two had come together, the Ashaninka got the short end of any available stick. The more aggressive and wily Quechua had repeatedly exploited the natives, treating them like chattel, placing them in slavlike working conditions and then refusing to pay



them an agreed-upon wage.

The Ashaninka concept of land ownership was tenuous, but they understood that when a man builds a hut in a given spot, the surrounding area within a kilometer or so is his, until he chooses to go elsewhere. Thus, an Ashaninka was uncomprehending and vulnerable to a slyly smiling Quechua who might ply him with *agua ardiente* ("firewater"), then offer him an ax and a machete in return for signing or placing an inked finger on a piece of paper.

"Don't sign anything!" I warned. "Don't touch their papers!" But the natives simply could not conceive that a piece of paper could supersede natural law, or that a sign or a fence could keep anyone off of God's freely given property.

As the leader of the community at Cuti, [Pepe](#) had to file and maintain whatever paperwork the government gave him, such as birth certificates, reports concerning the ownership and maintenance of the airstrip, and, as time passed, an increasing number of rulings regarding land ownership. One of the most important of these was a government declaration delineating the limits of the Quechua's legal encroachment. This was a mere line drawn on a map (reminiscent of when Pope Alexander VI, in his Treaty of Tordesillas, scratched a line that divided South America between the Spaniards and the Portuguese). As additional settlers moved into the area, I decided that it was necessary for me to study that document carefully, so I asked [Rigoberto](#) to fetch it from Pepe. Rigoberto had finally settled in at Cuti. He and Soledad now had three daughters, and I hoped that he had found happiness.

Rigoberto returned from his errand with a report that Pepe had no papers."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"No papers," Rigoberto repeated with a shrug.

I headed for Pepe's house to investigate and learned that he had burned all of the documents. "Burned them? Why did you burn them?" I asked, bewildered. "What do I need with these papers?" Pepe responded. "I can't read."

The Ashaninka are a fierce people when necessary, but their first instinct is to flee from trouble. Thus, in the beginning, those who lived closest to the encroaching settlers simply moved their huts across to the south shore of the Cutivireni, farther into the rain forest. They did not seem to realize that other settlers would follow and eventually squeeze them into oblivion.

I could see from my maps that the Ene River valley might be the last stand for the Ashaninka. The only other possibility lay far to the east, across the nearly impenetrable Vilcabamba Range, in the region of the Urubamba River, and the Machiguenga tribe, cousins to the Ashaninka, already lived there.

One day I spotted a large metal sign that the Quechua settlers had placed on the far bank of the Ene, announcing a land boundary. Nearly three yards wide, it read: COOPERATIVA DE SANTO DOMINGO. In a fiery mood, I went in a canoe with [Matías](#) and a group of other natives across the river, and the Ashaninka watched as I tore the offending sign down and smashed it to bits.

On occasion I lectured the natives, advising them to resist the encroachment. I told them that they had every right to defend their land. My private thoughts were more vivid. To myself I thought: Maybe you should put an arrow up a settler's ass.

The one thing that the Ashaninka had in common with the settlers was a passion for *fútbol*. At first I thought that the activity was good, clean fun. But it soon grew too serious, especially when the opposing groups began to place side wagers on the outcome of the games. The sums appeared

paltry, and yet they could be the equivalent of a week's wages, or more. And I knew that the settlers could manipulate debt to their advantage. I warned [Mario](#) and [Nicolás](#), "If you get mixed up in this *fútbol* with the settlers, you are going to lose your land."

A few of the settlers sought to establish trade with the natives. They set up stores of their own and offered the Ashaninka a higher price for their cacao beans than the mission cooperative could pay. I was immediately suspicious, for the cooperative was careful to pay the going rate, established in Satipo, and I could not understand how the settlers could afford to overbid. I asked Mario to investigate, and he posed as a customer, reporting back to me that some of the settlers had weighted their scales, or used other tricks to bamboozle the natives. One of their favorite gimmicks was to pay in small bills, so that the total appeared to be a great sum. Mario and I tried to explain these devious activities, but the Ashaninka had a difficult time grasping them. They could not conceive of the lying; you could tell an Ashaninka two conflicting stories, and he would believe both of them.

The Quechua, in their dealings with the natives, were no different from other elements of Peruvian society, which suffers from a distinct lack of ethical principles. Wages are minimal throughout the country. There is only a small middle class; a great gulf exists between the rich and the poor. In such an economic climate, slyness becomes a necessity, subterfuge a virtue. What is wrong is to get caught.

It was inevitable that President Belaúnde's grand scheme to parcel out land would be abused. Some of the settlers, after they had blazed fields out of the rain forest, destroying thousands of acres of virgin lumber—ostensibly to plant crops of cacao and bananas—used some of their land to grow

coca. I found this regrettable, but understandable. Coca is the oldest stimulant known to man, and chewing the dried leaf has sustained the people of the Andes since prehistoric times. Vessels containing coca leaves have been unearthed from burial sites in Peru dating back to 2100 B.C.

The Incas considered the plant divine, brought from heaven by the legendary founder of their dynasty, Manco Capac. Inca social and religious life revolved around coca. The right to chew it was a sovereign gift bestowed upon priests, doctors, warriors, scholars, and relay runners who traveled 150 miles a day. It was said that if coca was the last thing a dying man tasted, he went to heaven.

Even today, coca is the gift that some Peruvian Indians give to the parents of a prospective bride, to be placed under the cornerstone of a new house. It is also an abundant source of vitamins. Millions of Peruvians routinely chew coca leaves, and millions more drink *mate de coca* ("coca tea"), which is sold in every outdoor market. Growing coca is not illegal in Peru. Like all of God's gifts, if you use it correctly, it can be beneficial. You can walk into the finest hotels in the mountain cities and order brewed coca to combat the penetrating headache caused by what Peruvians call *soroche* ("altitude sickness").

But coca has long had its opponents. In 1567 the Council of Lima (established by Spain) described the drug as "a worthless object, fitted for the misuse and superstition of the Indians." Over seventy ordinances concerning its use were issued by Francisco de Toledo, the fifth Spanish viceroy. The prevailing attitude, however, was that coca was a relatively harmless opiate. A Jesuit missionary, Father de Acosta, proclaimed: "I think it works and gives force and courage to the Indians, for we see the effects which cannot be attributed to imagination, so as to go some days without meat, but only a handful of coca . . ." At times, the conquistadores paid Indian mine workers in coca leaves, and the Church even collected tithes from them in coca.

Today, the majority of Quechua are addicted to the mild high of the coca leaf, and Peruvians have difficulty understanding how cocaine, the principal alkaloid of coca, is used in the United States and elsewhere to destroy people. They do not comprehend why it is illegal to sell the leaves, or the processed paste, to anyone other than a licensed government official.

Such ambivalence allows drug traffickers to thrive. If a Quechua has a cash crop of coca leaves to sell, he sees nothing wrong in peddling it to the highest bidder. Peru is the world's largest grower of coca.

As the coca trade in the Ene River valley grew to be an ever more thriving business, it placed the mission in increasing jeopardy. The settlers sold their crops to a few mysterious and sinister characters—some Peruvian, some Colombian—who took up periodic residence in the area; at the mission, we referred to them as narcos or amigos, but they were not our friends. On the other hand, they were not our enemies either. They had their business, and we had ours. So long as the two worlds did not clash, I felt there was little I could or should do to intervene.

The Ashaninka trusted me, but as time passed I could sense trouble in the air. More and more, we heard the eerie whine of high-speed-motorboat engines plying the heretofore quiet waters of the Ene, heading between the settlers' town and locations far down the Ene and Tambo rivers.

During a hunt on the banks of the Mamiri, natives discovered a suspicious-looking area. They reported this news to me, and some of them accompanied me on an inspection tour. We took a boat to the site, which was beautifully camouflaged both from the river and from the air.

What we found appeared to be a makeshift coca-processing laboratory, consisting of little more than three holes in the ground. Off to one side was a supply of heavy plastic sheeting. Studying the

arrangement, I surmised that the settlers lined these holes with plastic, filled them with coca leaves, added a chemical such as kerosene or an acid, and mashed the leaves into coca paste, which was much easier to transport than the leaves.

I decided to gather what evidence I could. I scraped a residue of coca paste onto one of the plastic sheets and folded it into a manageable rectangle. Back at the mission, I stored it safely until my next trip out of the jungle.

Discussing this find with the natives, I was enraged to learn that some of the amigos had offered the Ashaninka coca seeds and pledged to buy the crop at prices well above the official government rate.

On this point, I had to be firm.

I told the people, "If I ever see one coca plant on your land, I will leave. You choose. Do you want to plant coca or do you want me to stay?"

Later, when I was able to show my evidence to an officer at the military base in Mazamari, he raised his hands in a gesture that communicated that he had heard it all before and gave me the same advice I had given to the Ashaninka. "Don't get involved," he warned. "Forget about it."

"Divine Providence" persuaded my bishop to assign four nuns to Cuti. I would have preferred a swarm of *manta blanca*.

Sister Carmen, a gentle woman of Basque heritage, took over operation of the community store and did an excellent job.

Sister Candelaria was an aged Quechua woman with a disposition cold as ice, but she liked the Ashaninka very much and they responded to her. She taught the women basic needlework and

improved the curriculum of our school.

Sister Yolanda was a young woman from Requena, a northern village in the Iquitos area of Peru. She had a touch of Indian blood in her veins, which helped her to develop an affinity with the natives. Her task was to teach catechism courses to the children.

Sister Primitiva, the nominal superior of the group, was an attractive woman in her forties who marched into the clinic and assumed it as her private domain. She provided competent health treatment for the natives, yet for some unfathomable reason, the clinic always seemed to be in a state of disorder. She was obsessed with the idea of piety, and demanded the same of her three companions. She saw sin in everything, accusing me of a trinity of, admittedly accurate, trespasses: smoking, drinking, and cussing. I once muttered to a shocked [Brother Pío](#), "If this is the bride of Christ, then I don't much care for His taste in women."

Sister Primitiva was rankled by Sister Yolanda's friendship with the natives. The elder nun complained to me that too many of the natives sought the company of Sister Yolanda, rather than hers. "I'm the superior," she reminded me.

I explained that I had no control over whom the natives spoke to, and I attempted to point out that because Sister Yolanda was much younger—and part Indian—the natives found her more approachable.

My words did not appease Sister Primitiva, and I foresaw trouble. Soon, Sister Primitiva began taking time away from her work at the clinic to monitor Sister Yolanda's catechism classes, and grumbled that the young nun tended to stray from some of the more rigid Church doctrines.

One day, as Sister Yolanda prepared to leave for Camantavesti on a field trip with some of the catechism students, Sister Primitiva made a point of saying to her, in my presence. "Be careful about

your vow of chastity!" Sister Yolanda's face reddened.

"That was uncalled for," I reprimanded, but Sister Primitiva marched off without a word, knowing that she did not have to please me.

I never investigated the details, but before long, Sister Yolanda was transferred from Cuti.

It was Sister Primitiva who declared, unilaterally, that she was going to open the clinic to the settlers. She was blissfully unaware of the tension that would create.

"Keep the settlers away from me," I muttered. "Very far." The clinic had been established for the Ashaninka, not the Quechua. Sister Primitiva simply did not understand the sense of betrayal that the natives would feel.

Before long, she was badgering me to make pastoral visits to the Quechua. "If I cross the river and go to the settlers, the Indians will be offended," I said. "Again, it would seem like betrayal."

"The Quechua are Catholic," Sister Primitiva argued. This was true. Although few of the Quechua were highly devoted, their heritage was Catholic.

I pointed out that the settlers were welcome to come to the mission for mass. I never refused the sacraments, but I did nothing to encourage the Quechua's presence.

In her holy indignation, Sister Primitiva took her complaint to the new bishop of the Vicariate of San Ramón, Luis Máestu, who quickly called me on the carpet. "The settlers are Christian people," he reminded me. "You must go visit them."

"With all due respect, Bishop, I cannot do that," I replied.

He glowered and asked why.

"If I cross the river to go visit the settlers, the natives will never accept it. They will think that the padre is abandoning them."



The bishop thought this over but instructed, "The settlers are entitled to receive the sacraments."

"I promise you, I have never denied them the sacraments, assured him. "If they come to mass at the mission, they are welcome."

The naturalness of the natives, particularly in sexual issues, dominated the nuns' thoughts. They had a difficult time accepting the pure simplicity of the Ashaninka. A breast-feeding mother or a bare-bottomed child made them uncomfortable. More than once I saw the nuns admonish the youngsters to cover themselves or give the women a "tsk... tsk" if they allowed a nipple to flash into view. This was especially true when a visitor, such as my friend François, a bush pilot from Satipo, was present.

After a while, I could take no more of this nonsense. Following mass one day I made a speech to all of the nuns. My gaze lingered for a moment on Sister Primitiva. "François is coming today, and I know what you are going to do," I said. "You're going to tell the women to cover their breasts and warn the little girls not to show their private parts. You are teaching them shame. They don't need shame." The sisters were sullen and silent. Sister Primitiva's eyes accused: Yes, François is bringing in supplies for the people, but he is also bringing Scotch and American cigarettes for you. "Okay," I continued, "if I see you doing that today, I will go out to the plane completely naked. You choose."

We had no more lessons in shame.

If the natural, open behavior of the Ashaninka confounded the nuns, the sisters' very existence was a curiosity to the natives. They were single women, so the Ashaninka considered them to be marriageable. "No, no, no!" Sister Primitiva explained far and wide. "We are the brides of Christ."

A few of the Ashaninka men lived in perfect harmony with two or three wives, and this was a situation that the nuns found intolerable. Roy complained to me one day that the nuns wanted to ban his two younger sisters from our school. Since Roy's father had two wives, the sisters had decided to make an example of him by shunning his children. Roy asked with genuine confusion, "Why can Christ have all these wives and my father can have only one?"

That's a very good question, I decided, and took delight in referring him to Sister Primitiva for the answer.

A friend in Lima had given me a little plastic friar. When you pushed down on the doll's shiny bald head, an erect portion of anatomy parted his vestment. I had seen Sister Primitiva eyeing this delightful little toy, but she never remarked about it in my presence. One afternoon, when I spotted her marching toward the kitchen, I placed the friar on the table and sequestered myself behind a partition, out of her view.

Sister Primitiva entered what she thought was an empty room. She glanced to the left, then to the right, to assure herself that she was alone. Then she walked over to the table, picked up the statue and flipped it upside down.

"Aha!" I yelled, jumping from my hiding place. "You want to see his *pájaro* ["little bird"]!"

She ran from the room, hands aflutter, shaking her head and screaming.

[Gregorio](#) and his family had a penchant for intrigue and confrontation. Once again they put the entire village in an uproar Gregorio's sons, Nicolás and [Teodoro](#), had assaulted Pepe.

"Nicolás is a *pig*," Sister Primitiva complained. She said he had used the most abusive language she could imagine.

Pepe was furious and demanded a *reunión*, a meeting. At the *reunión*, several people suggested that it was time for Gregorio and his troublesome family to leave Cuti. Gregorio threatened angrily to ally himself with the settlers and launch a war, and I worried that he could and would do it.

Finally, Pepe asked me what I thought. "I'm not the mayor," I said. "I just have a mission here. But it seems to me that the one who is really offended is Gregorio."

Several eyes looked at me in astonishment. Gregorio's face beamed as I praised him—quite excessively—for his contributions to the community. I chided his sons for embarrassing such an honorable man. Then I suggested a solution: Nicolás and Teodoro should buy an entire bolt of cheesecloth for Pepe as a reparation, and they should pledge that if they were the cause of future trouble, they would leave voluntarily.

The compromise was accepted by all parties. Pepe was happy with his cheesecloth. Gregorio and his family were pleased that they could stay. Only Sister Primitiva was furious.

The passing years brought visible signs of the settlers' profligate use of the rain forest. The roots of jungle trees are shallow. When you slash and burn, you expose a thin layer of topsoil with a clay base. The first rainy season is sufficient to wash away the topsoil, and you are left with hard, infertile land. Many of the Quechua saw their new fields disappear, and thus had to encroach further, destroying more of the forest. It was a vicious cycle that, if left to its own, was sure to push out the natives.

In my efforts to draw public attention to the tenuous existence of the Ashaninka, I enlisted the aid of the press. Through a series of newspaper and magazine articles, we attracted notice of the conflict over the Ashaninka territory, the final bastion of their culture. As a result, we hosted

increasing numbers of visitors, including government officials. This brought criticism from some of my colleagues in the Church who viewed me as a publicity grabber, but if it helped the Ashaninka, I did not care.

Fighting back, some of the settlers denounced me to the Peruvian government, leveling the ridiculous charge that I utilized the Ashaninka as slave labor to work a secret gold mine and thus secure my fortune. I received several hostile letters, one from as far away as Survival International of London accusing me of encouraging the natives to give up their land to the settlers and of using religion as a cosmetic facade. More serious was the charge, leveled by others, that I trafficked in cocaine.

The nuns' insistence on ministering to the Quechua did not help. Sister Primitiva was determined to open our school to the Quechua children.

The tension made me ill.

One day, after riding my motorbike down to inspect some of our farmland, I felt unaccountably disoriented, and I decided that I had better go to the clinic for an examination. "My ears are buzzing," I complained to Sister Primitiva. "I'm having dizzy spells."

She checked my blood pressure, and her face registered alarm. "What a fool you are," she declared with a scowl. "You smoke and you drink that [\*piarintsi\*](#), and you have François fly in some Scotch too. Don't you?"

Some things are too obvious to deny. On occasion, François was even able to ferry me in a supply of Chivas Regal, and he always brought American cigarettes.

Sister Primitiva lectured me for several minutes, until I pointed out that my blood pressure had never been a problem until she arrived at Cuti. Undaunted, she prophesied, "You will either have

a heart attack and die, or you will have a stroke and be paralyzed."

"Oh, Sister," I said, "I much prefer the heart attack. I don't want to go through life with my *pájaro* paralyzed. "

"Everything is funny to you," she scolded. "That is no way for a priest to talk."