

SELVA VIVA, THE AIR WE BREATHE

An excerpt from a journal entry

• MICIAH JACOBS

As I sit, swinging on a hammock in the Amazon rainforest watching the sun go down in purples, oranges and yellows over the Rio Arajuno, I think back to my journey here and embrace how good it feels to be alive.

I have witnessed an ignorance that saddens me. Poverty lurks around every corner, drastically contrasted with the rich living just inches away and not seeming to care. It seems that perhaps they are trying to follow in the footsteps of the United States, perceived as beautiful and powerful. Desperately they try to imitate it. There is a constant turmoil here between those who want their country to become “developed” and those who don’t.

“Third World” does not mean what my ignorant mind had perceived. There are people here — fighting to keep their traditional ways of life — that have a beauty of their own.

I now live without running water or electricity; I have no TV, nor anything remotely similar, and yet I miss nothing but the faces of people.

The hardest part, though, is coming to understand that a distance must be kept if we are to be able to release these animals once again. It is such a delicate process for humans to interfere in their lives, trying to set them right again. It is even harder to understand why these people are allowing

such a beautiful place to be overrun by foreign oil companies. They are giving up their self-sufficient ways of life and hunting more in order to sell exotic pets and meats for money.

My Argentinean friend said something the other day: “Estas en los pulmones del Mundo: You are in the lungs of the world.” This place I am living in provides and circulates a vast proportion of oxygen to the rest of the world.

The pipeline will come soon — destroying part of our protected forest where we release our animals — so that we can have oil. And what we can do to stop it?

• **MICIAH JACOBS** is a senior conservation-biology major. After studying abroad with the UW Cimas program in Quito, Ecuador, Miciah worked with endangered animals in the Amazon rainforest in 2002.

I wake up to screaming monkeys at night to make a hot water bottle and feed them milk. I do not remember what makeup or clean clothes feel like, nor do I really care. Electricity and hot showers are only in dreams. I don't miss any of it. I have begun to really appreciate the feeling I have all day working and getting incredibly dirty, and then every night when I finally get to shower in the waterfall and let my hair down and for the first time all day feel like a human girl.