

## Is she real? Inspiration for Mica meeting Clay

I thought I was hallucinating – a blonde woman walking toward me on a jungle path about as far away from humanity as you could possibly be. I was so convinced she wasn't real that I walked by her with barely a nod of my head. True story and the inspiration for the lead chapters in my upcoming novel, *Parallels That Cross*.

It was 1977 and my first trip into the amazing world of tropical rainforests. I was a grad student with a group of LSU Museum of Natural History scientists. We were there documenting the biodiversity of the Pampas de Heath, an amazing relict of a larger grassland further south in Bolivia. This team discovered 17 species of birds that had never been seen in Peru ([see Graham et. al 1980](#)).

We were there for a month during which I spent most of my time in a small camp in the middle of this pristine area. Every day was filled with wonderfully new sights and sounds. I was in biological heaven and dreaded leaving. I was the last of our group to leave this beautiful place that felt like home and walk the two-mile path to our base camp along the Rio Heath. From there we were to use a motorized canoe to make our way back to the urbanized world.

My Peruvian friend helping us had given me a leaf of the coca plant used by workers throughout Peru to keep their energies up. I was hesitant but thought it would be appropriate to chew this single treasured leaf on my sad walk out of one the world's most remarkable locations. I had no idea what to expect but had envisioned something noticeable would happen. I kept walking and waiting but nothing changed, no nirvana, nothing profound, nada.

Then there she was – an unexpected apparition walking toward me, looking at me, sort of scaring me like I was going crazy from one coca leaf. I hunkered to the side of the trail, bobbed my head with a brief glance, and kept walking. At camp, five minutes later, everyone was buzzing about our new visitors, a man and my mystery woman, who had arrived via a handmade raft from up the Heath River where they had been hiking by themselves through the Bolivian rainforest.

We had a good laugh at my wild imagination that night over camp soup in our work tent. My former apparition, now friend, had looking for her private powder room along the trail as we passed each other. And now 40 plus years later, that chance encounter inspired the fictional meeting of two remarkable yet some-what flawed characters, Mica and Clay, in the Andes of Peru in *Parallels That Cross*.