

September 11, 2011

Dear ENGN 1930 Students:

I am looking forward to the time with you on Tuesday. The syllabus gives a couple links to my work, so I will let those suffice for introductions. If you only have time for one link, visit www.raxacollective.wordpress.com and randomly select a few posts under the Raxa Collective id. Those will let you know about my perspective in the present tense. Speaking of perspective, I thought I should share a bit of history with you prior to our session, considering “the question” and some of your other guest speakers.

I first met Douglas McMeekin on March 6, 2006. Thanks to a mutual friend at Cornell University, I had the opportunity over lunch to learn from Douglas about his project in Ecuador’s Amazon basin. I remember thinking that he was straight out of a Werner Herzog film⁽¹⁾. I also remember joking, in a very reverential manner to at the end of the lunch: you are either a visionary or a lunatic.

The next time I saw him was November 14, 2009 at the Net Impact Conference that coincidentally was held at Cornell that year. A few years and a few hundred feet from where I had first met him, I listened to Douglas describe the accomplishments of Yachana in the ensuing years, in front of a standing room only auditorium. I realized while listening that I still could not tell the difference between a visionary and a lunatic: but it did not matter because Douglas was a doer, someone who gets important things done against the odds, creatively and in good spirits. In short, a social entrepreneur.

On June 18, 2010 my random connection to Douglas intersected with my random connection to Brown University’s social entrepreneurship program and its outreach. I had given a lecture in Quito about my work in the previous 15 years, and someone asked me two questions in rapid fire: whether I knew Douglas and whether I knew about the “brown people” in Ecuador. I was stumped on the latter, but was introduced immediately. January 13, 2011 in an ongoing email exchange between Alan Harlam, Douglas McMeekin, David Poritz, Tyler Gage and myself (among others), the opportunity for me to join you on Tuesday was hatched. So, I am looking forward to it.

Best,

Crist Inman, Ph.D.

Founder, La Paz Group

(1) Fitzcarraldo