

Jessica Bertram, 54 years old

Born and raised in Germany, I had my first trip to Peru in 1991 and moved there permanently in 1994 when I married an Andean highland farmer and had two children. I have lived in Cusco and Puerto Maldonado (Peruvian Amazon) for the last 30 years and currently speak Spanish, German, English, and Quechua fluently and am proficient in Shipibo, Harakmbut, and Matsigenka. Up to the time that I moved to Peru, my life in Germany was always marked by a longstanding interest in plants, animals, and indigenous languages/cultures. When I was 15, I was faced with the death of my mother and subsequent adoption into a foster family. My anthropological inclinations were discouraged, but while apprenticing to become a dental technician, I travelled to Peru twice to have an intimate and non-touristic immersion into Andean Quechua culture.

Subsequently, Peru became my home country. Initially, I started a dental laboratory, worked as a German teacher, and occasionally interpreted for German tour groups in the rainforests. In 1997, I became a freelance naturalist guide of Manu National Park for prestigious tour operators like Pantiacolla Tours, Manu Expeditions and Inka Natura. I also served as an honorary consultant for Manu's indigenous Harakmbut and Matsigenka people on eco-tourism, plant use, and social issues in native communities. My ever deepening friendships with community people allowed me to immerse myself deeply in their cultures and everyday lives. My personal focus has been on the Harakmbut people and their history. I have been collecting scarce ethnographic materials over a twenty-year period, making it available to the remaining families of the individuals described in the first anthropological and other publications and depicted in the photos, in an attempt to re-awaken indigenous people's interest in their own history.

In 2001, the healing of a life-threatening health condition by traditional Amazonian medicine initiated my strictly traditional Shipibo apprenticeship for becoming an Ayahuasca healer. I dieted on "plant teachers" and learned healing techniques. For the first 7 years, I performed traditional healing ceremonies with only local indigenous members. My first experience being in ceremony with non-indigenous peoples was in 2008 at an Iquitos conference.

Currently, besides being a busy single mother, I support the Harakmbut, Yine, Matsigenka Council (COHARYIMA) and, as an active advisory board member, the Escuela Superior de Medicina Tradicional Shipibo in Pucallpa (where I was officially certified), which is the first school of its kind in traditional Shipibo medicine. I also provide socially and culturally adapted healthcare treatments and counselling to individuals from very diverse social and cultural backgrounds at my home.

From 2010 to 2014, I have been travelling to Canada where my unique transcultural application of Amazonian plant medicine in ceremony had been increasingly requested and appreciated by Westerners and First Nations People alike. It is part of my dream to make my skills increasingly available to Northern First Nations People to show that it is

indeed possible to retrieve apparently “lost” ancestral knowledge, which can then help them confront the impacts of historical trauma and deal with them more efficiently in a culturally appropriate way. Additionally I wanted to serve as a bridge to bring their collective historical experience to the Amazon with the goal of broadening Amazonian Native People’s understanding of the historic impacts of colonization and to increase both indigenous self-awareness and to address the need of Western societies to see vital value in indigenous knowledge systems.

In order to learn how to present my empirically amassed knowledge and experience in an academically appropriate and acceptable way, I applied to the Indigenous Governance Masters Program at the University of Winnipeg and was accepted into a qualifying year in the pre-Masters program, in order to catch up on academic requirements before entering the Masters Program itself.

During the same time, I lived in Puerto Maldonado with my daughters for four years, working at the Native Federation of the Madre de Dios Ecion (FENAMAD), at the recently created office for the defense of the Amarakaeri Communal Reserve, indigenous Harakbut homelands, then under threat by oil and gas development. As a practitioner of Shipibo traditional medicine, I was sought after a lot by community members of the various native peoples in the area who did not find any solution to their health issues within the Peruvian public health service establishments. I fully dedicated myself to my healing work and to what I refer to as “culturally adapted and transculturally applied transpersonal ethnopsychology”. My unpublished works include: an ethnobotanical dictionary for the Manu area, Spanish translation of an English novel containing unique historical information on the Harakmbut people, and a growing collection of Harakmbut songs, stories, and other unpublished ethnographic material. My personal commitment, passionate research and subsequent studies in anthropology, ethnobotany, Amazonian shamanism, ethnopsychology, transpersonal psychology and quantum physics have made me an expert practitioner using indigenous Amazonian tools for integral healing and personal transformation, for both indigenous people and Westerners alike.

I went back to Cusco for another five years for my daughters to finish school and make it into university. During that time, I was unable to find a suitable location to practice traditional Amazonian medicine amidst a scenario marked and dominated by the various offers on the market of mystical tourism. Fortunately, my dear friend and associate Victoria Corisepa offered her banana plantain as a first place to host Westerners and carry out ceremonial work, thus bringing Parign Hak - Grandma’s Home into existence. Because our center was very successful, I was then able to purchase a large piece of land in Manu, outside of the province capital Salvacion and build my house where I live to this day, growing local jungle crops like bananas, plantains, manioc, pineapple, citrics and timber trees that had been previously selectively logged.

The global pandemic brought Parign Hak-Grandma’s Home’s operation to a screeching

halt. It has been almost four years that I have spent not only continuing to plant timber trees and jungle crops, but also pushing back landhungry encroachers on my land, which has taken a heavy toll on my overall health and wellbeing. However, Parign Hak is now reopening, and will hopefully get back to the degree of previous operations.