

THE MINDFUL WORD

by Diana M. Raab An award-winning memoirist, essayist, blogger and poet living in Santa Barbara, Diana's been writing ever since she received her first pen more than fifty years ago. She is the author of eight books and numerous articles and poems. Her passions include journaling and inspiring others to write. She's a regular blogger for the Huffington Post and her website is: www.dianaraab.com.



Spiritual Traveling in Peru

Last month my eldest daughter turned 30. As a proud mother I thought this warranted a mother-daughter trip to Peru, a place we have both always yearned to visit.

Our ten-day journey was absolutely magical.

Even though **Rachel** is a world-class photographer, I have to admit that the pictures do not measure up or empower as much as visiting the place itself. In planning our trip, we chose to embark on a more spiritual orientation that would take us a little off the beaten path. I chose the travel company **Amazing Peru** to help organize our trip, and they did a superb job. As per my request, they found us two great guides – one older and one younger – just in case my daughter wanted to go out and party at night, she would have someone other than her aging mother in town!

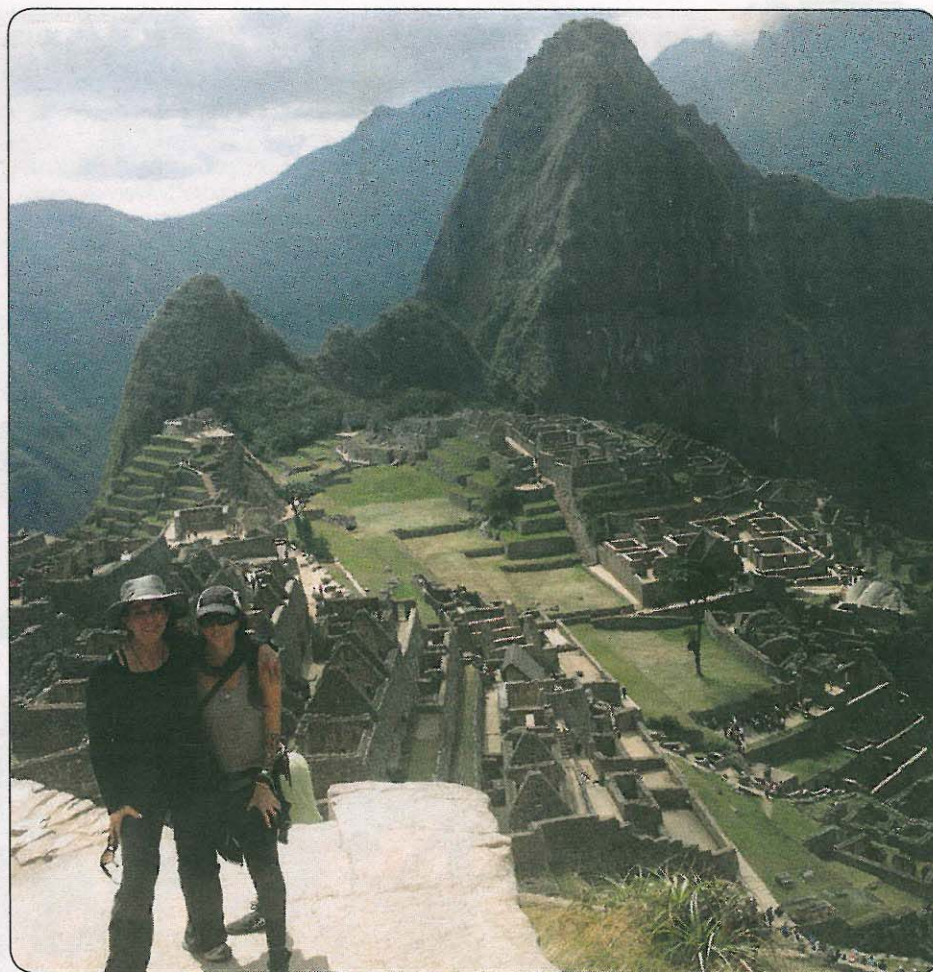
Our itinerary included visiting Lima, Cusco, The Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu. Every aspect of the trip – from the people to the food to the markets to

visiting the Inca sites – was unforgettable. Visiting Peru affected me on both a personal and spiritual level. Although I tried to journal each day, some days were so packed that I simply collapsed in bed at night. It's too early to tell whether the writing I did manage to do will develop into anything (like my last major family trip to Africa, after which emerged my poetry collection, *Listening to Africa*), but even after being back a month, I continue to feel the transformation stirring deep inside of me.

To prepare for the trip I read a few terrific books, including *The Lonely Planet* and *Andean Awakenings: An Inca Guide to Mystical Peru* by Jorge Luis Delgado and MaryAnn Male.

These books gave me a sense of the sites we would visit, but in reality, the photos and descriptions did not come close to the intensity of the experience.

When first arriving in Lima, and throughout the journey, we were given coca leaves to chew on to help prevent



Diana Raab and her daughter, Rachel, in Peru. A picture cannot do the journey to Machu Picchu justice.

altitude sickness and intestinal upset. Except for Machu Picchu (which is about 8,000 feet), we were at about 12,000 feet above sea level. Also available were chewable candies we could buy which were made with coca leaves.

We took a one and a half hour train ride from The Sacred Valley to Machu Picchu where we spent two days and one night at the **Sanctuary Lodge** – definitely the highlight of our trip. After resting for a bit, we hiked with **Master Shaman Pedro** who handed out coca leaves as offerings to the hikers and rangers we passed along part of the Inca trail. We learned that Pedro, similar to **His Holiness The Dalai Lama**, had been destined to be a shaman since he was a little boy.

During the hike, he did a few short ceremonies until he found a suitable and quiet area to set up an altar with the sacred items he had carried in his backpack. He began a ceremony by unwrapping some hard candies and tossing them randomly in the surrounding forested area. "Mother Nature (Patchimama) has a sweet tooth," he said. He then pulled out a horn pointing it in all four compass directions calling the spirits to join us in the ceremony, and asking permission that we use their territory.

After the ceremony and blessings, he gifted Rachel and I with a small ceramic pot and placed a chakana pendant suspended from a black string around our necks. The chakana depicts the Southern Cross constellation that the ancient Andeans believed to be the center of the universe. They saw this very clearly in the Andean skies. Each of the four stars depicts a compass point. The Incas also called the chakana "The Tree of Life." It has 12 points and signifies the three

worlds: the underworld (symbolized by the snake), the current world (symbolized by the puma) and the upper world (symbolized by the condor). The hole in the center signifies the city of Cusco.

With the Shaman we continued our hike to Intipunku or the Sun Temple. The Incas worshipped the sun and always lived on mountain tops because they felt safer there. They also worshipped the mountains and saw them as their protectors. And now that I am back, I must say that I worship everything about that very sacred place!

On trips like these, there are always surprises and this time one of our stops included a connection to Santa Barbara. My daughter is a yogi, specializing in acro yoga, and we had booked a few days at a yoga retreat called **Wilka Tika** (meaning "sacred flower" in Quechua). When booking I did not know that the owner was originally from Santa Barbara. On our first evening while sipping on a glass of Malbec in the lobby, I picked up a book, called *Journey to Machu Picchu* written by **Carol Cumes** and **Romulo Lizarraga Valencia**. In the preface, Carol wrote how she began her spiritual journey twenty years earlier, when as the wife of a dentist living in Hope Ranch and mother of four, she visited the Peruvian Andes. I nearly dropped the book, but then caught it and could not stop reading. Carol shared her love for the Andean culture and her own spiritual quest and how she became inspired to open this amazing yoga retreat. I was honored to witness the fruits of all her dreams and hard work in this vegan retreat where all the served food is actually grown on the land. It was wonderful and fortuitous, like our entire journey in the sacred land of Peru and the Andes.

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