

La Doctora: Practicing Medicine on the Amazon River

Linnea Smith

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Dr. Smith's clinic in the Amazon is a 9-by-12-foot room with plywood walls, no ceiling, no running water, kerosene lighting and bats roosting beneath her desk. In this modest arena she delivers babies and treats snakebite, malaria, tuberculosis, pneumonia and leprosy.

In a particularly vivid passage, Smith recounts operating on a patient to remove a tumor, using her bed as an operating table: "Since the bed had been designed at a convenient height for sleeping, not for operating, I had to half-kneel, half-stoop. Occasionally I straddled her in order to get at the tumor. And even with Joe aiming a flashlight into the cavity, the light from the curtained window was so dim that it was difficult to see well enough to do a good job."

How did a Wisconsin physician come to practice medicine in the Peruvian rainforest? Almost a decade earlier, Smith took a much-needed vacation from her thriving Wisconsin practice. She chose the Amazon rainforest as her destination, unaware that she would fall so deeply in love with the area and choose to live there for the next eight years.

More than simply a collection of medical cases, this book explores the local culture and chronicles Smith's efforts to fund and build a new clinic. The book gives rare insight into "bare-bones" medical practice and the exhilaration of following one's dreams. Of interest to travelers and medical professionals.

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