

## EDP WI Week December 7th 2019

"We have far more in common with each other than things that divide us"

Jo Cox MP

The other Saturday I woke up with a pressing need to visit the bathroom and the knowledge that the facilities were both basic and up a muddy lane, with one bucket to flush and another to wash in. I was rewarded by the fact that Mama Flora had lit the clay oven earlier to heat the water for us. I was her guest in Peru, on Amantani Island in the world's highest navigable lake, Titicaca, struggling in the thin air of 4000m. All of which makes it hard to explain my wanderlust.

But there it is: Seeing the world through words on the page, photos, videos is satisfying; but not the same as seeing clouds moving across the landscape or feeling the wind in your hair. Reality can be disappointing: Machu Picchu came wreathed in misty rain after a long journey from Cuzco, but somehow, that only enhanced the mystery of this iconic site. I was left pondering that the benefits of a connected world are often unexpected. Whilst the Spanish Conquistadors had arrived to take all they could find, our little party was there to look, listen and learn.

Everywhere has a problem with plastic, but Amantani Island is the only place where I have seen them collected and strung to mark field and path boundaries. In the Nilgiri Hills of southern India: I had seen the bottle tree, made from hundreds of discarded bottles, wound around a tree leading to a bin, designed to symbolize the negative footprint humans leave behind when they litter by artist Madhavan Pillai who says: "Each piece of trash sucks the life out of nature, and humanity,". The WI have been quite creative with litter too, from the formation of 'Keep Britain Tidy' organization in the 1950s to our recent involvement with the 'Phase-out of Plastic Pollution Bill', drawn up by the WI working with Friends of the Earth and given its first reading earlier this year.

Elias, our local guide on Amantani was clear that locals can survive without tourists, but their income enhances the quality of life. A levy of £2:50 per head to the community funds simple paths and tracks, paved to allow easier movement of mules and motorbikes. He told us the story of how, as one of four teenage lads, he helped to rescue a woman in the final stages of labour. The doctor and midwife could not help her. Together they carried her in blankets to a boat and then she travelled four hours to Puno and the hospital. Nowadays the tourist levy pays for a house where women stay for the last two weeks of pregnancy and the first two weeks after the mother returns from hospital. Problems can be spotted early and mum and baby only go home when they are ready. Our own NFWI's report on maternity experience 'Support Overdue' gives guidance for maternity care, emphasising that the end result is not the birth. All the stages of pregnancy, birthing, and postnatal care matter because all of those stages shape all of the years that follow.

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Elias had, as all Peruvian guides do, local knowledge and university education. The latter made possible he said, because "travel opens your eyes". He was allowed to go to school after his father had been chosen to go to France with a tour of native musicians. An experience that made him change his mind and encourage his sons to get an education.

Our Amazon expert, Roldano, showed us which leaves best replaced plastic wrap. Also how Brazilian fires fill the skies of Peruvian rainforest with smoke. Rain falls on the deforested lands of Brazil and downstream in Peru, the level of the rivers rise quickly and sometimes catastrophically. Mark Twain said: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness". We prosper in community and the WI is one such, based on the ideals of fellowship, truth, tolerance, and justice. We want to secure a fair and sustainable future for ours and the next generations through WI influence on legislators, decision-makers, and opinion-formers.