


 Community Interaction

## *Improving Health and Income in Canelos\**



### Returned Peace Corps Volunteers Annie and Roque Sánchez Story

In 1985 a “gringo” couple Roque and Annie Sánchez arrived in the indigenous community of Canelos, in the Amazon region of Ecuador. Inhabitants of the community didn’t understand why these U.S. Americans had come to this remote location.

Besides the cultural differences, this couple had the challenge of living in an extremely remote place requiring a 4 hours to walk from the main road through the jungle. But despite the remoteness, the couple didn’t give up.

Roque, who was raised in the Dominican Republic, was skilled working with wood, so he began carving musical instruments like drums and maracas. When the community saw the instruments, they were so excited that they immediately wanted to learn how to make them. Roque taught them how to carve and paint figures with local resources.

For generations, the “Quichuas” had used clay pots to keep water or “chicha.” Roque encouraged them to make macagua pots (from the wood of a tree with white flowers and small fruit). He also made market contacts in Quito so the community could join the larger artisan community. The profits were so great that Hilario Canelos’ family was able to transform their straw house into a house with a kitchen, a “zinc” roof and cement floor.



**Annie Sánchez making “macagua” pots with her family.**

Roque and Annie also designed other projects to help the community. Having a Bachelor’s degree in Nursing, Annie addressed the poor sanitary and water quality conditions that resulted in a high child mortality rate. Most of the children got sick during the weaning process, because the chicha they consumed was prepared with the contaminated water from the river. Annie and Roque received a grant and created a rain water collect system, built latrines and initiated vaccination campaigns in the nearby communities. Annie encouraged the community to use soap for bathing, a custom they did not have at the time. This reduced skin infections, and soon taking a bath became a sign of prestige.

Happy moments weren’t only reserved for the community who recognized the new changes, but also for Roque and Annie when she became pregnant. This was wonderful news for the community.

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*Image taken from [www.huella-verde.org](http://www.huella-verde.org)*

***Canelos is a rural parish from Pastaza county in the province of the same name***

They often visited Annie with offerings of food and company. Before this, one of the biggest obstacles for Annie had been connection with the community. Her pregnancy created another opportunity for connection.

Roque received funds to start a carpenter's shop in Canelos. With these funds they bought tools and machinery, while the local church agreed to hire a teacher to train local students in carpentry.

On August, 13th, 1987 Annie gave birth a boy, Lennen, in El Puyo. A short time after, the Sanchez family returned with their newborn, to celebrate the carpenter shop opening as well as to let the community know they were parents already and to say good bye. With a mix of hard work and good luck, the Sanchez family gained the communities' confidence and love and demonstrated that 'gringos' can also have kids.

*\* Taken and adapted from the Magazine "40 years of Peace Corps Ecuador" of John Zorovich.*