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Honing Her Skills in Ecuador

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Honing her skills in Ecuador

Hallie Whyte '07 learned a few new skills while studying in Ecuador.

She learned how to communicate when you don't know the language, how to cook Ecuadorian food and how to blow a poison dart gun – the latter perhaps the least marketable skill for her resumé.

Whyte, a gifted pastry chef and cook, who is passionate about math, had a dramatic transformation during her four-month stay at Linfield's newest study-abroad site last fall.

"I learned how much more there is in the world and how lucky people who live in the United States and other developed countries are," she said. "A lot of the people I

hours on a boat to reach a village that most Ecuadorians have not seen. The Huaorani, a village of about 50 people, have their own language, culture and traditions. Whyte learned some of their alphabet, watched demonstrations on how to make a hammock and dart poison, and tried to shoot a blow gun.

"The people were incredible," she said. "I was fascinated by how they live. I've never felt so welcome in any community. They were so happy, loving and affectionate and excited to show us how they live."

Food has been one of Whyte's touchstones, and the food of Ecuador was a particular fascination. She began to hone her cooking skills as a child. She has worked at Tina's in Dundee, popular with the wine-tasting crowd, since she was 17.

"My favorite part is helping people make the connection between good food and good wine," she said. "It's fun helping them appreciate all the parts that go into making one dish."

Her love of food proved to be common ground with her host mother in Ecuador, who was a wonderful cook but did very little baking. And baking – especially desserts – is Whyte's specialty.

She taught her host mother how to make different kinds of cookies and bars, including her

special chocolate torte. As a parting gift, her mother gave her a book of her favorite recipes.

"She learned to cook like I learned to cook – you don't know amounts, you just know by sight," Whyte said. "That makes it all the more special because she had to go through all the recipes and explain what she meant by a 'pinch' or 'touch'."

Although Whyte plans ultimately to attend graduate school, she is considering returning to Ecuador or another South American country.

"I could very easily work in a South American country, teaching English, for a couple of years," she said. "I completely fell in love with the culture."

– Mardi Mileham



Hallie Whyte '07 attempts to blow a dart gun during a visit with the Huaorani tribe deep in the Amazon jungle of Ecuador.

met have nothing by our standards, but they were happier than many people I know here. They made me appreciate everything I do have."

Whyte, a math major and Spanish minor, discovered how much she enjoys learning language. When she left for Ecuador, she met the bare minimum requirement for Spanish. She's now fluent and volunteers at McMinnville High School helping newly arrived students learn English. But it was a struggle at times. Her host mother spoke no English, and they had to find ways to communicate until Whyte honed her language skills.

Her greatest adventure was the week she traveled deep into the rain forest via the Amazon River to visit the Huaorani people, a culture completely isolated until less than 50 years ago. She and other students spent eight hours on a bus, five hours in the back of a truck and 18