LIVING WITH HEADHUNTERS

Yes, that's me at 16 (in 1960!) with Tangamashi, a Shuar Jivaro chief who adopted me into his clan. The Jivaros are the only people on earth who make a shrunken head of their enemies killed in battle – called a "tsantsa."

They inhabit the Amazon rain forests of the Ecuador-Peru border; living with them was the first adventure I had by myself alone. Tangamashi accepted me, taught me how he made a tsantsa from an enemy's head skin, took me blowgunning monkeys with curare-tipped darts, and introduced me into the Jivaro spirit world with a tea they called "natema" from the Banisteriopsis vine – a very colorful experience. How cool can you get for a 16 year-old kid?

It set me on a path of an adventurous life from which I have never wavered – and there's no slowing down now. Another great adventure always awaits. (*Glimpses of Our Breathtaking World #25,* photo ©Jack Wheeler)