



Mark Plotkin addresses students on time spent in the Amazon Rain Forest

Plotkin speaks about his time in the rain forest

by: Ginny Bonkemeyer

Dr. Mark Plotkin spoke to Meredith students and faculty at Monday's honors convocation, "Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice."

A leading ethnobotanist, Plotkin has spent 15 years researching new medicines in the Amazon Rain Forest with the Amazon Indians. He shared many stories from his travels with a vivid slide show and examples of rain forest medicine.

Plotkin presented several distinct points in his lecture. He discussed in detail the tremendous importance of plants as they are used in medicine. Eighty percent of the population relies on plants for medicine. This fact questions the impact of rain forest lands that are lost or destroyed, and the effect on these people.

Plotkin's goal is to learn or recover the secrets of the shamans, the Amazon medicine men. He gave many examples of rain forest medicine and its uses, such as a non-addictive pain-killer 80 times more potent than morphine, or the sap of a tree used to treat Athlete's Foot many times more effectively than any modern medicine.

Curare, according to Plotkin's *Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice*, is "a blanket term for all arrow poisons prepared by tribal peoples from tropical plants." Plotkin spoke of his interest in curare that took him back to work with the Tirios tribe.

Western civilization has had a tremendous impact on the tribes that have been exposed to it, and has led to a rapid loss of their own culture, including their vast knowledge of rain forest medicine. The younger generation has lost interest in knowing the secrets of the shamans, deeming it old-fashioned when their world has been opened to shotguns and modern ways.

This problem has been turned around by Plotkin's creation of the Shaman's Apprentice Program, a program in which shamans share their knowledge for Western medicinal use, allow their secrets to be written down for future tribal generations, and teach the methods to the tribal youth. Through this program, cultural pride has been instilled back into the tribes.

Plotkin voiced the need for ethnobotany not to be purely selfish, and that the indigenous peoples needed to benefit from helping the Western world. This sentiment prompted Shaman's Pharmaceuticals in California and a non-profit organization called Healing Forest Conservancy that returns a percentage of all profits to indigenous peoples.

After sharing his stories and vast knowledge, Plotkin ended by saying, "It's not too late. You can make a difference."

Luau is inside success

by Arinn Dixon

The MEA luau started with a bang on Wednesday—a bang of thunder, that is. The luau never even had a chance to be held outside due to the appearance of Hurricane Opal, which dumped about 20 gallons of water on us on Wednesday and Thursday. The rain didn't stop luau co-chairs Kristin Young and Meredith Wright, though. "We were really upset about the weather at first," Young said. "Then we realized we could make it great inside or outside."

Well, they did something right because the indoor luau was a hit. The food included such delicacies as hushpuppies, zesty pasta salad, and an awesome assortment of fruits. The food lines were not too long and everyone's plate was full when they sat down.

The MEA luau committee went to great lengths to give the luau an outdoor appeal, even though it was forced inside. All of the MEA members wore colorful shirts and grass hula skirts. The tables in the cafeteria had balloon bouquets and leis were given out to those who wanted to look especially festive. The whole atmosphere radiated carefree fun. MEA member Karla Hall stated, "Considering that it's pouring, I think we have a great turnout. I think everyone is having a lot of fun."

Probably one of the main reasons everyone had such a great time was the band that MEA booked, The Usuals. They were a "Hootie-like" band who played popular songs like "Tequila," "Ob La Di," and hits by Stone Temple Pilots and Led Zeppelin. When they started playing "Dyer Maker," girls began to scream and got up to dance. Donna Gurganus and Monica Holtz had this to say about The Usuals: "We want this band for formal!"

One of the most noticeable things about the luau was that people didn't just get their food, eat, and leave. They lingered after they had finished eating and talked to friends, listened to the band, and had dessert. It was generally just a time for Meredith women to get together and socialize. It's pretty obvious that the MEA luau committee did an awesome job.

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