

# Duo encounters bugs, mud, 'mixed-up beliefs' in Amazon Basin

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**By Shawn Hendricks**

*International Mission Board*

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—Pat Townsend admits she's living outside her comfort zone.

Between the bugs, mud and freezing showers, Townsend, a missionary with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board's Masters Program, admits it could take her awhile to adjust to life in and around the Amazon Basin of South America.

"The bugs haven't been as bad as I anticipated," Townsend, 56, said. "I've asked people to pray for me about the bugs."

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A boy peers  
around the  
corner of his  
house in the  
Amazon  
Basin. Some  
children live  
in isolated  
areas where  
outsiders  
cannot  
reach them.  
Their only  
hope to hear  
about Jesus  
is through  
the prayers  
of faithful  
Christians  
for the  
gospel to  
reach their  
villages.  
(Photo/IMB)

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Townsend and her husband, Mike, 59, left the comforts of retirement and their home in Mississippi to work among the southern Shuar people for two to three years. Fewer than 2 percent of these 15,000 people are evangelical Christians.

Religion for many southern Shuar blends worshipping spirits with Catholicism. Some Christian workers say that's an all-too-common practice among indigenous people groups of South America.

"They will take some of the classic religion (Catholicism) and then mix it with their own (animistic) beliefs," said Russ Bare, who leads indigenous work in Ecuador. "And then you just get a hodgepodge of mixed-up beliefs."

Couples like the Townsends are a godsend to Bare.

"I think it's great that people with good health, in this part of their lives, would make themselves available to go to someplace like the Amazon Basin

to reach a people like the southern Shuar with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

During their first days among the Shuar, the Townsends explored the territory. They took boat rides up and down the river to nearby villages and they hiked up to one of the waterfalls.

For the Shuar, waterfalls have an unusual purpose.

Evaristo, president of several Shuar villages, noted many of his people go to waterfalls to take hallucinogenic drugs to see visions they believe will reveal more about their god or gods.

Fortunately, the southern Shuar live in areas where missionaries like the Townsends can reveal the God of the Bible to them.

Mike Townsend, however, admits it will take more than a missionary presence to change the hearts of the southern Shuar.

“For anybody to be successful with the Shuar, God will have to work” among them, he said. “The Holy Spirit will have to do some things for them to see and understand he is the true and one God. I trust he will do that.”