

Lolita and
Maria Talk
About Alcohol



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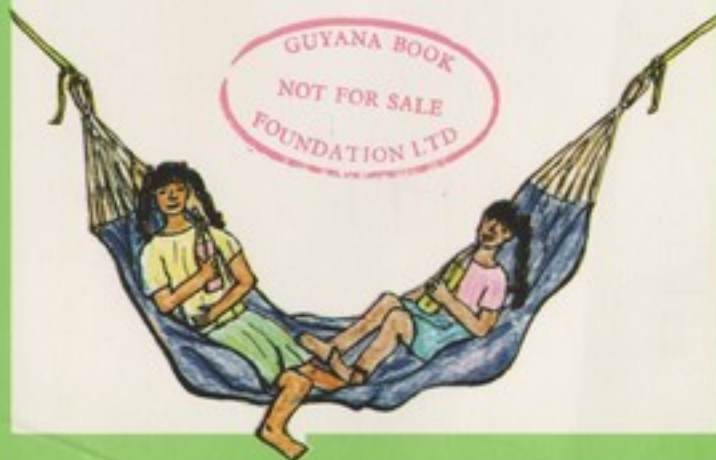
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Layout and design by Samantha James

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INTRODUCTION

Say hello to Lolita and Maria! They and their friend Ricky have lots to say to you.

The children in these books pose the essential questions and their teacher, health worker, and peers discuss the issues, work through the problems and try to answer the questions. The theme here is learning by doing—doing the right things to keep clean, eat well, have clean teeth, prevent malaria, avoid AIDS, alcoholism, and diarrhoea.

This series of booklets is first of all, a gift to the children, youth and community of Annai in the North Rupununi District of Guyana from Liz Schuster, a Peace Corps Volunteer and the creator of the booklets. Her work was related to primary health care and outreach and she was formally attached to the Ministry of Health's local health centre in Annai from 1999-2001.

Iwokrama is particularly pleased to have been able to help bring these books to life by supporting Liz and her Peace Corps colleague Linda Bueno in their community development and outreach work in Fair View village. Samantha James, Information Specialist of Iwokrama, assisted by Ramona Zephyr, meticulously rendered the stories into digital format and helped enhance the design, colour and general layout of the text. The Guyana Book Foundation has played a key role, too, by covering the costs of printing and distribution to hinterland schools throughout Guyana. Leila Jagdeo, the manager, has been an anchor of the project in this regard.

The books can be used in a variety of creative ways to help spread the health messages. The youths of Annai, for example, could adapt the stories to be aired on their community based radio station, Radio Paiwomak. Villagers anywhere could make quizzes and skits to reinforce the themes for community and classroom use. The booklets, in and of themselves are delightful, authentic and useful for young and old alike. We urge children and teachers to keep them off the shelves and firmly placed in the hands of pupils. Books are not ornaments, and these particular books are to be read and re-read and used and re-used and put into practice by all of us who get the chance to read and hear what Lolita and Maria have to say.

Vanda Radzik
Community Development Fellow, Iwokrama

Maria's father drinks too much. He gets high almost daily.

The children do not like to be near him when he is high.



He talks funny, he can't walk straight, and sometimes he even falls down.

When it is really bad, he does not come home - or worse, sometimes he does come home, but he is angry and wants to quarrel and fight with Maria's mother.



"He is like a different person when he drinks," Maria tells her friend, Lolita.

"What does he drink?" Lolita asks.

"He loves parakari and cashiri because they come from cassava, and they cost no money. He also drinks beer and rum," Maria explains.



"I even saw him drink alcohol once, and he got really sick."



"My father used to drink plenty, but he stopped," Lolita says. "Let's go ask him how you can help."



He tells the girls that only Maria's father can control his own drinking. "What you can do is to talk with him," he says. "I will help him too."

Maria talks with her mother first. They decide that they can help by not making so much kari.



"I know that parakari is part of our Makushi tradition, and I am glad that you know how to make it. But that does not mean we need to make so much!" her mother says.

Others decide to make less kari too. They will still have it for weddings and birthdays, but the party will be one night only.

"These parties that go on for three days are not good for us," one woman says.



"We have families to care for and work to do!"

Maria has a good talk with her father.

"Thank you," he says, "I am sick, but I want to get better. Drinking is bad for my health. I should be a better example for you and your brothers and sisters."



"The 'nice' feelings from drinking don't last long, but family is forever."

Maria tells her father, "You can start by only drinking a small amount. But if you cannot stick to that limit, you will have to stop drinking altogether."



"Lolita's father and other men and women who have stopped drinking can help support you," Maria says.

Later, Lolita and Maria talk about alcohol.

They are happy that they are young and that they do not drink alcohol.



They see how hard it is to stop drinking so they say, "We just won't start!"



Problems with Alcohol:

Alcohol affects motor skills. It can make it hard to do everyday things like walking and talking.

Alcohol affects decision making. It can make it hard to make good choices.

Alcohol affects emotions. It can make someone feel very sad or angry.

Alcohol affects family life. It can cause violence in the home: abuse, injury, assault, and even death.

Alcohol affects health:

- ◆ It can cause brain damage
- ◆ It can be bad for the liver
- ◆ It can cause heart problems
- ◆ It can cause a stroke
- ◆ It may cause some cancers
- ◆ If a pregnant woman uses alcohol, her baby may be born unhealthy.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge that the ideas for the text and drawings of this story were drawn from everyday experiences of living and working in Annai Village, as well as from the following sources:

Werner, D., Thuman, C., Maxwell, J., (1992) *Where There Is No Doctor*. Hesperian Foundation, California.

Makushi Research Unit, (1998) *Alcohol Use in Makushi Culture*. North Rupununi District Development Board. Guyana.

This story is the result of an effort to compile information available in Guyana and to build upon it by placing it in a more localized Amerindian context. It is hoped that the simple language and drawings will attract the interest of children and those beginning to read.

Text and drawings by Liz Schuster, Peace Corps Volunteer (1999-2001), Annai Village, North Rupununi, Guyana.

Layout and design by Samantha James, Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development.

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