



Nelson's Journey through the Amazon Rainforest

Illustrated by Deirdre Hyde
For the Rainforest Alliance

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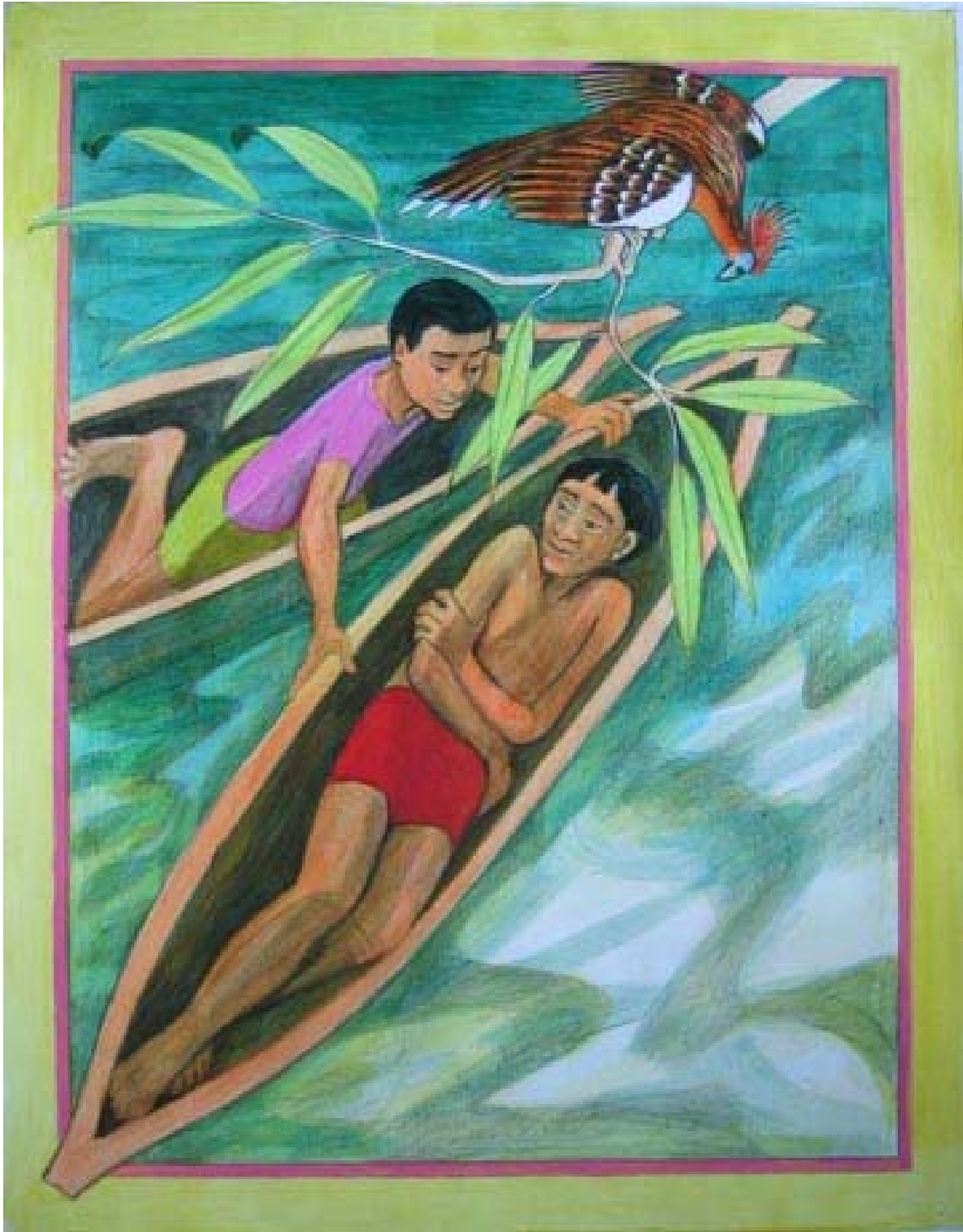
Nelson paddled up Brazil's Rio Branco in his dugout canoe. The river was filled with piranha and many different fish swimming in every direction. A fish leapt out of the brown water and made a big splash. A flock of blue-headed parrots flew squawking overhead. Nelson was on a mission. Earlier that morning, Nelson's mom caught him stomping on a long line of leaf cutter ants and she was angry. "How could Nelson not appreciate and respect the leaf cutter ants and the forest?" she wondered. Nelson's mom ordered him to spend the day in the forest and report back on five reasons why forests are important to Nelson, his family, his community and the whole world.

Suddenly, Nelson heard a group of birds called hoatzins cawing around the next bend in the river. He paddled over to see what the birds were squawking at. The hoatzins croaked louder and flew into the forest as he approached.



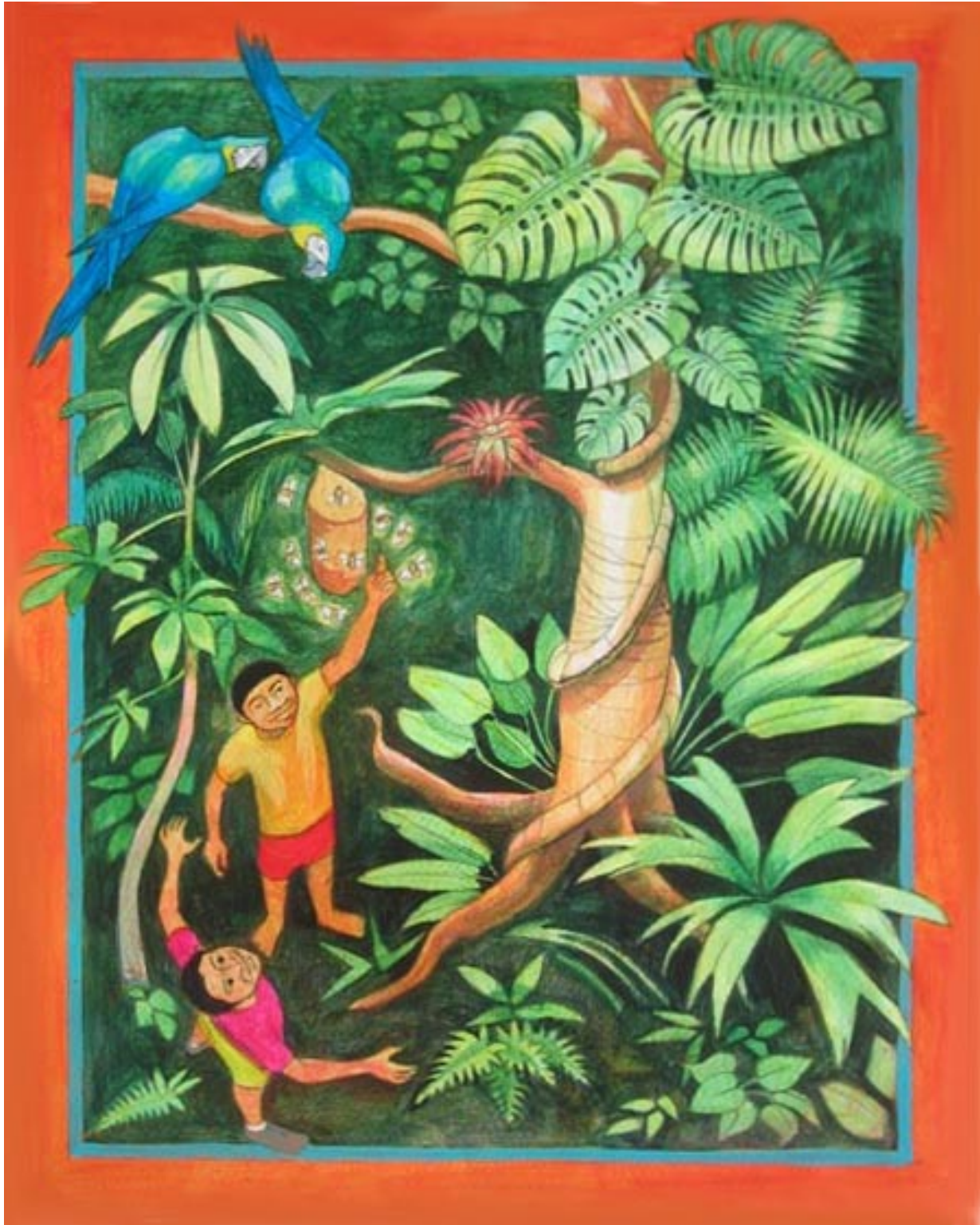
Nelson noticed a small dugout canoe floating beneath the branches and quickly paddled up to it. He was surprised to find a boy napping inside the canoe. Nelson tried to quietly paddle away but the boy woke up and called to him "Hello!" Nelson rowed back to his new friend and introduced himself in Portuguese. "Hi. I'm Nelson. I live in Boa Vista do Ramos. What's your name?" The little boy tried to understand Nelson but was just starting to learn Portuguese. He tried his best to reply, "Hi. My name is Davi. I am a Yanomami. I live in the forest."

Nelson was delighted to learn that Davi was a Yanomami, a group of people who have lived in the Amazon rainforest for many generations. Nelson realized the first reason forests are important. Forests are home to people like Davi and his family. And, Davi was just the person Nelson needed to help him meet his mother's challenge. Nelson explained to Davi his mission for the day. "Would you please help me find five reasons the rainforests are important to us and people around the world?" Nelson asked. "Sure! Better yet, I would love to show you around the forest so you can see the reasons for yourself," Davi replied.

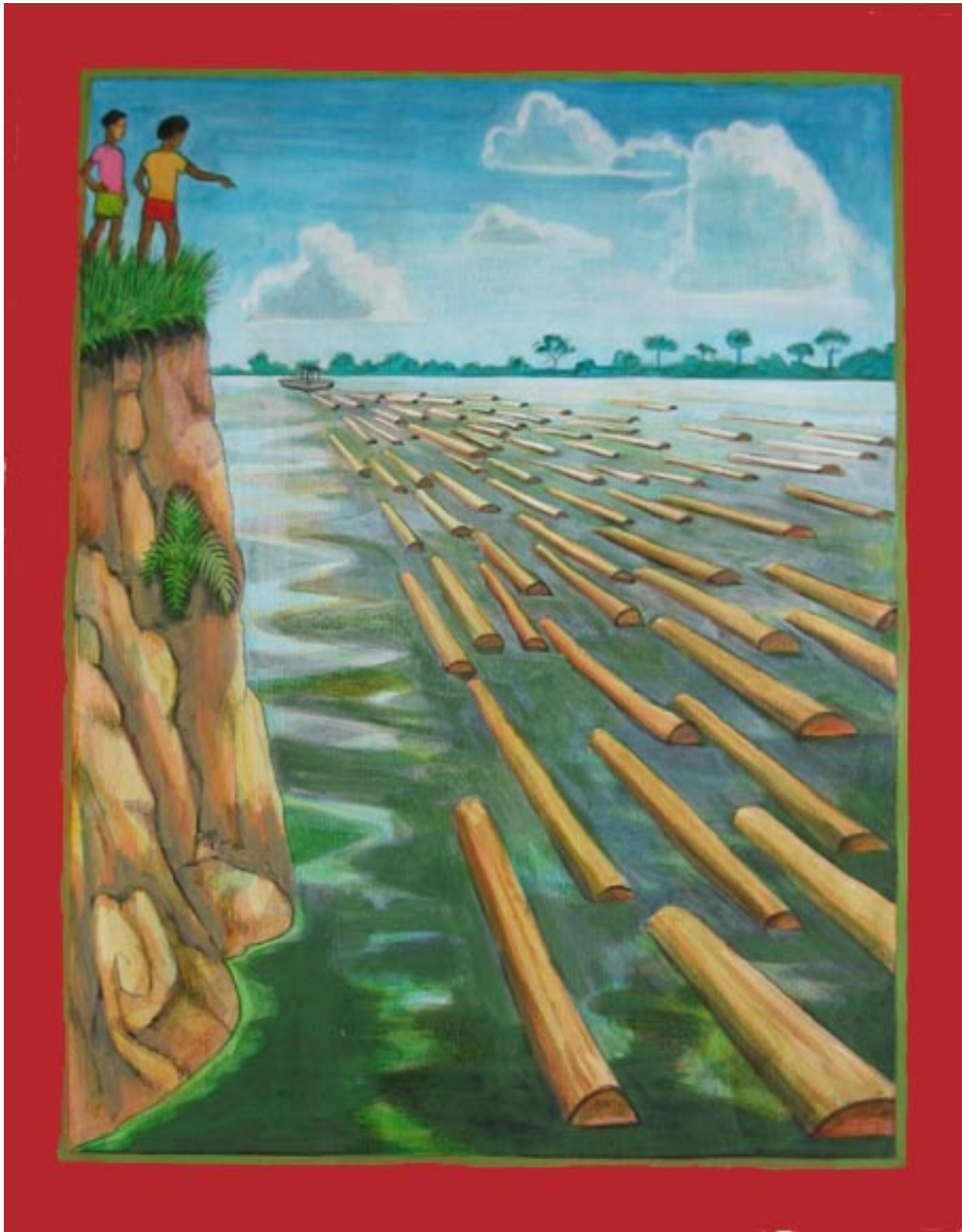


Nelson and Davi pulled their canoes up on the riverbank and set out to explore the forest together. It was cool and dark inside the forest. Giant trees towered over them and birds sang high in the branches. A screaming bird whistled in the distance. A pair of macaw birds squawked in the top of a tree. Hearing a monkey yelp in the distance, Nelson realized that forests are also home to animals. Without the forest, these animals, like the Yanomami people, would have no place to live.

“Take a deep breath,” Davi directed. Nelson did. He loved the feeling of the fresh forest air filling his lungs. He realized that the trees provide oxygen not just for him, but also for the whole world. Davi told Nelson that in addition to giving off oxygen, trees take in carbon dioxide from the air, helping to fight global warming. Davi was proving to be a great teacher!



“And that’s not all Nelson,” Davi said as they neared the edge of the forest. “Look!” He explained that to truly understand the importance of forests, Nelson needed to realize that forests provide people with many things, called resources. These resources include wood, fruit and medicine. Nelson remembered that his own community in Boa Vista do Ramos used many resources from the rainforest.



As Davi pointed out a long line of leaf-cutter ants marching to their nest, he explained: “Everything in the forest has a special job. Those tiny ants help make soil from which the tallest trees grow.” Nelson realized why his mother was so angry at seeing him stomping on the ants earlier that day. Nelson’s mother, family and the entire community of Boa Vista do Ramos are committed to protecting the forest.

“Our community does cut down some trees,” Nelson told Davi, “But, they let most of the forest grow, so that there will be trees in the future.” Nelson remembered something else his mother had taught him. “My mother says that by harvesting some of the trees, and making things out of the wood, our family can afford to pay for our home and food, while protecting our forests. And when we grow up, my brothers, friends and I can continue to make money by harvesting wood and other resources from these same forests. Now that I understand why forests are so important, I will help to protect our forests so my children and grandchildren can enjoy, use and protect the forest too.”



To thank Davi for his help, Nelson invited Davi back to his house to share dinner with his family. Davi happily accepted the invitation. While they ate delicious fruits from the forest for dessert, Nelson's mom was delighted to hear how much Nelson had learned during his time in the forest with Davi.

After Nelson finished washing the dishes, he could not find Davi anywhere in the living room or kitchen. "Davi! Come out! Come out wherever you are!" Nelson called as he walked out onto his porch. He was surprised to see Davi asleep in his family's hammock. This time, Nelson did not wake Davi up from his nap but instead quietly returned to the kitchen.

Nelson explained to his mom "Davi is taking a nap. Being a forest guide and teacher is hard work!" His mom laughed as Nelson continued, "Davi taught me that from ants and birds to trees and oxygen, each part of the forest has a special job to keep the forest healthy. And healthy forests are important for the animals, people and for our planet Earth. Nelson's mom gave her son a big hug and said "I'm proud of you."

