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Life at the edge: Benthic invertebrates in high altitude Andean streams

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Acknowledgements

I never thought how digging out mussels in the Amazon could take me so far. That first step into a muddy swamp in 2002 steered a radical shift in my life, from parasite metabolism and tropical diseases to the ecotoxicity of metals in freshwater invertebrates. At that moment, my supervisor had offered me a PhD in molecular and biochemical parasitology at the Prince Leopold Institute of Tropical Medicine in Belgium, but I refused twice. Many times I asked myself if I made the correct decision. Now I can say without doubt I did.

One of the first articles I read on metal ecotoxicology came from a research group in the Netherlands: the AEE. After a first contact and many e-mails, Wim and Michiel helped me writing an article on the Amazon mussels. By the time of publication, they were already my promotor and co-promotor, although the official start of my PhD had to wait. As Harm told me once, I was always in the AEE's list of 'pendings'. For five years, Wim, Michiel, Helen and me worked hard on several proposals for funding my studies, making all kind of contacts and administrative procedures, until we finally succeeded in 2008. When I met Wim and Helen for the very first time at Schiphol airport, and later Michiel, I felt like knowing them already for a long time.

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