



SCOTT HUBBARTT

FOREWORD BY COL. TOM BLASE, RETIRED USAF CHAPLAIN

A SHORT WALK TO THE EDGE OF LIFE

**How My Simple Adventure Became a Dance with Death—
and Taught Me What Really Matters**

Praise for
A Short Walk to the Edge of Life

“Think Robert Frost meets *The Worst-Case Scenario* handbook. Reading *A Short Walk to the Edge of Life* took me on the worst possible ‘road not taken,’ and even though I feel beaten up and drained emotionally, my spirits are lifted. Indeed, his journey has made all the difference.”

—ERIC BLEHM, *New York Times* best-selling
author of *Fearless*

“I feel and understand the writer’s suffering as he clung to life in a most rugged environment. While Scott Hubbartt expresses disappointments, he still was willing to pursue the ideal point of his destination. As a Holocaust survivor, I can relate his determination to mine. In my own way I, too, walked to the edge of life. When people are in a peril of life, Scott Hubbartt’s book *A Short Walk to the Edge of Life* could serve them well in reaching their attainable goals. I strongly endorse this book.”

—BORIS KACEL, author of *From Hell to Redemption*

“A true story that makes a compelling read. Scott Hubbartt tells it as it happened. A real-life experience and a refreshing change from the mundane.”

—NORMAN BRACKENRIDGE, volunteer in humanitarian
endeavors worldwide

“This is a gripping, real-life account of retired air force veteran Scott Hubbartt, who set off on foot for what he thought would be a simple day hike. Instead, the trek became a near-death experience. Readers will find his telling of the journey—and its unexpected and dramatic detour—is as entertaining as it is profound. You are drawn into the story, feeling as if you are walking with Scott along the treacherous slopes of the Andes or tasting the last drops of life-giving water when his very survival is in

doubt. Along with witnessing his courage, you will share in Scott's epiphany about faith and love and will celebrate his rescue and recommitment to the things that matter most in life. This is a must-read story that will entertain and inspire with each turn of the page!"

—LARRY K. GRUNDHAUSER, Brigadier General,
US Air Force (Retired)

"What was meant to be a short walk in the Peruvian puna turned out to be a four-day battle of survival for Scott Hubbartt in which he not only faced the edge of physical endurance in the most difficult conditions but also touched the depths of a man's solitary struggle, both emotionally and spiritually. In this precarious moment, Hubbartt gathered all his strength, hope, and confidence, while turning to higher and divine wisdom. His touching and powerful story is a plea for faith, humility, and gratefulness."

—ERIKA SCHUH, author, traveler,
and international volunteer

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**WATERBROOK
P R E S S**

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For Glenn

Good people are good because they've come
to wisdom through failure. We get very little
wisdom from success.

—WILLIAM SAROYAN

He who limps is still walking.

—STANISLAW JERZY LEC

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Foreword

This book captures Scott Hubbart's story and describes the way almighty God met his needs and answered his prayers through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Scott, a retired air force leader, husband, father, adventurer, and historian, launched a planned ten-mile hike in the Andes mountains and desert of the beautiful country of Peru. Scott's wife, Carolina (Carito), is a native of Peru, and Scott had fallen in love with the homeland of his bride. He planned this supposed eight-hour hike to retrace some of the steps of his wife's ancestors. The walk turned into a struggle for survival and a near-death, five-day ordeal. I know I will never think the same way about a bottle or a drink of water.

In Scott's words, he was trained for, confident about, and even arrogant about this adventurous excursion. But he quickly learned new lessons of humility and faith as he became lost, desperate, and close to death. He simply tried to survive and was prepared to die. He rediscovered that his only help was in the Lord: "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1–2).

Scott says that he was saved physically on that journey in the mountains of Peru, but even more important, he was "re-saved" spiritually for a new purpose with renewed Christian passion in his soul.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Scott was ready to die and sincerely faced his mortality, but then God delivered him. He found new life and was liberated for a renewed purpose as a man of faith.

As you read Scott's story and hear about the background, setting, and events of his five-day excursion, read prayerfully and listen to the

message of the miracles of God in Scott's life. But also, on a personal note, ask almighty God to give you a pliable and teachable heart so you can hear and apply the message that God has for you personally.

God bless you.

Tom Blase
Chaplain, Colonel
US Air Force, Retired
March 2013

A stylized, light gray topographic map with contour lines and a dashed line, serving as a background for the top half of the page.

I And So It Begins

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

—James 1:5–6

*Wednesday, 2 November 2011, 1950 Hours,
Casa Barrera, Trujillo, Perú
(8° 06'37.05" S, 79° 01'19.36" W—Elevation 130')*

Journal note that I left at my bedside in the Barrera house the day before my departure:

2 Nov. 2011, 1950 hours—Trujillo

On the eve of my long-awaited adventure to Cerro Pingullo in the western Andes. I am searching for the hamlet of Chepén and Las Minas Casualidad, which are mentioned in my wife's grandfather's [Felipe's] will.

As a gringo in Peru, I am an anomaly. A stranger. I have many handicaps—the inability to fluently speak the language not the least of them. Still, I go. There are more intrepid souls, but I figure myself about middle of the road. Still, I go into the unknown in the lower Altiplano of the middle-western Andes.

My destination tomorrow is Salpo. From there I hope to explore Carabamba and the hamlet of Chepén. In a day or two I will attempt the descent to Poroto.

Felipe did it, who knows how many times. I want to tell my grandchildren about his exploits from firsthand experience.

They say I'm crazy. That's OK. I'm just curious and determined.

Hubbartt

— — — — —

I'm just a regular guy. I balance bills, pay a mortgage, and try to be the best father I can be to my three grown daughters as well as an acceptable husband to the perfect wife. But in a nutshell, during a week of November 2011, I messed up big time.

This is my story.

It all started when I went for a walk in the Peruvian puna, which some call the Altiplano and others the Alto Pampa. It's the high desert region of the Andes mountains characterized by dry, barren, windswept, and rocky terrain—where only the hardest of living things can exist. It was supposed to be an eight- to ten-mile hike along what I expected would be an established, easy-to-follow trail. Instead, I became hopelessly lost and almost died.

After my fifteen visits to Peru, many people regarded me as a kind of expert on travel in that country. I was often complimented on my tales about my adventures in this wonderful land, which is twice the size of Texas. But that's the danger of flattery: over time you start to believe it.

It has been many months since my little expedition, and I am still trying to fully appreciate the gift I was given—*more than life itself*, which we too often take for granted. I now know that God has at least two plans for my life: One is that I was supposed to survive in that desert. Second, I am to share my story with anyone who will listen.

Searching for a Lost Gold Mine

“Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation.”

—Psalm 91:14–16

*Monday, 31 October 2011, 2230 Hours,
Aeropuerto Jorge Chávez, Lima, Perú
(12° 01'23.15" S, 77° 06'30.16" W—Elevation 95')*

I love adventure and travel, which are probably the main reasons I ended up fighting for my life in the Peruvian Andes.

As long as I can remember, I've never been able to stay put in one place for very long. So maybe it's in my genes, because I come from a long line of immigrants and travelers who were always on the move.

When I was a child, our family of six often packed up the Dodge and set off on cross-country road trips. I *absolutely loved* these journeys. One of our best trips was a drive from California to Iowa, where my dad grew up, and then on to New England to visit my mom's family, followed by a sweep through the South on our way home.

My two older brothers had dibs on the window seats in the back, with our little sister between them. So my usual place was in the middle

of the front seat with a road map on my lap. I relished the great view, and whenever we crossed a state line, I would stretch my legs as far forward as possible to ensure that I was there first.

My desire for adventure and love for the outdoors drew me to the Boy Scouts. Then after high school I enlisted in the US Air Force, partly so that I might see more of the world as part of my job.

In those days I never imagined I would visit Peru, but early in 1981 while stationed in South Dakota, I caught a glimpse of a beautiful girl, a fellow airman who took my breath away. I later learned that her name was Carolina and that in the 1970s she had immigrated to the United States from Peru. Things worked out well between us, and a year later my “Carito” became *mi vida*—my wife.

This was the beginning of my love affair with Peru.

From our first days together, Carito often shared with me stories of her homeland, and I grew increasingly enchanted with this exotic place. We first visited Peru together in 1986, traveling with our first daughter, Christina, then just an infant. We were able to see Lima as well as the city of Trujillo in the north.

I immediately fell in love with the vast, diverse, and alluring country. I also was intrigued by the stories of Carito’s family, especially her entrepreneurial grandfather, Felipe Lám, who himself was an immigrant from China, coming to Peru in 1908.

Sadly, I was not able to visit Peru again for any extended period in the next eighteen years.

— — — — —

In December 2004, shortly after I retired from the air force, I finally returned to Peru for an extended visit. Accompanied by several of Carito’s sisters and a brother, we traveled overland, crisscrossing the country from Lima to Arequipa and on to Puno, which hugs the edge of Lake Titicaca. We then ventured to Cuzco, where I visited the majestic and mystical Incan city of Machu Picchu. From there it was back to Lima and on to

Trujillo. My fascination with the country was sealed, and after that I returned at least once or twice a year.

Over time I traversed the country from top to bottom, across its three regions—up and down the coast, over the Andes, and into the Amazon regions. I absorbed as much of its culture, history, mouth-watering cuisine, and geography as possible. I simply could not get enough!

Planning the Short Walk

After yet another satisfying two-week visit together to her homeland in the fall of 2011, Carito and I had to part. She had to return to the States for a tour of duty, and I had to decide what adventure to pursue with my two remaining weeks in my beloved Peru. Still actively serving in the air force reserve, Carito needed to finish her final tour, and we looked forward to her completion of a wonderful twenty-two-year military career.

We had been visiting Cajamarca and then staying in Trujillo, in northern Peru, so we took a 350-mile bus trip south along the coast to Lima so Carito could catch her flight home.

In Lima, while we waited at the airport, Carito asked, “What are you going to do with your remaining time in Peru?”

Off the cuff I replied, “Maybe I’ll retrace your grandfather Felipe’s walk from Poroto to Salpo.” Then, to make my boast sound more plausible, I added, “But I’m thinking of doing it the easy way... I might do it in reverse and walk from the Sierra into the valley—all downhill.”

“Honey, just be careful, and *please* use a guide,” she replied.

Sometimes I’m a poor listener. This was one of those times.

I walked with Carito to the airport security station to see her off for the seven-hour overnight flight to Texas. Had either of us known it might be our last parting, it would have been different. Instead, we casually hugged, shared a quick kiss, and promised to see each other again in a few weeks.



A few hours later I was on a bus for the eleven-hour return trip to Trujillo, all the while pondering what to do with the next couple of weeks. I dwelt on our conversation in the airport and my dream to trace her grandfather's steps one day...and then suddenly I knew it was what I wanted to do! As an amateur historian and genealogist with a curious nature, I hoped to learn more about my wife's culture and family history.

For years I had listened intently when *mi suegra*—my mother-in-law, Evelina—talked about growing up in Peru and her Chinese immigrant father, Felipe Lám. A gentle, wise, and wholly good woman, Evelina always spoke of her father with kindness and a daughter's love. She helped me fill in so many gaps in the family historical narrative. Especially intriguing to me were her stories of Felipe's many talents and successes, including the businesses and properties he owned. And then there was that mystery concerning his rumored gold mines.

Trained in traditional Chinese medicine and fluent in several languages, Felipe was an opportunist. He never limited himself simply to opening a small stall in the town market to peddle herbal remedies. Instead, he sought out and seized opportunities wherever he found them, which served him well in his new country.

Born in 1890, Felipe grew up in the southern Chinese region of Guangdong, not far from present-day Hong Kong and Macao. Felipe stood apart from many Chinese immigrants in that he was well educated and ambitious.

Felipe eventually settled in the small town of Chepén, in northern Peru, on the well-traveled crossroad between Trujillo, Chiclayo, and Cajamarca. There his ambition, talents, and natural skills quickly established him in the community. Felipe realized this opportunity was a precious gift and if he applied himself, it would bring prosperity. And in time Felipe did prosper. He started several businesses, secured properties, and eventually married a local girl, Catalina Hernandez-Vasquez. Before long



Felipe Lám, the Chinese immigrant to Peru who owned a gold mine named Las Minas Casualidad.

they were blessed with three children: a son, Próspero (meaning “prosperity”), and two daughters, Mery and Evelina.

Initially Felipe was content with life in Chepén and worked well with both the Chinese and Peruvian communities as well as the surrounding Jequetepeque Valley farmers. He owned a fine home, which had an attached corner store, in Chepén at 13 Guadalupe Street. In the back garden of his home stood the largest mango tree in the neighborhood, which Evelina often recalled whenever she shared her childhood memories.

In the early 1920s, when Próspero was old enough for the trip, the boy was sent with an uncle to China. He lived there with relatives and was educated in the traditional language and customs. Sadly, a few years later word came that eighteen-year-old Próspero had died of heart trouble. While the details were murky, Evelina believed that he died of loneliness and a broken heart. Tragedy and sadness were not new to Felipe, and they would soon visit him again.

Around 1930, Felipe's wife, Catalina, died at the age of thirty-five. This left him with two young daughters to care for. On the heels of this loss, the ripples of the global depression reached Peru. Every businessman and industry felt the strain, and Felipe was no exception.

Before long Felipe married a woman named Celina, and then he inexplicably moved his small family more than ninety miles south to Poroto, a small town east of Trujillo in the Andean foothills. Poroto is set in a fertile mountain valley where it hugs the Río Moche and is joined by an almost always dry river called Río Chepén. Poroto is known for little more than sugarcane and pineapples, but the village also serves as a stopping place along the winding road from Trujillo to the high mining towns of Salpo, Otuzco, and Cajabamba—all hardscrabble settlements filled with rough men seeking fortunes in the canyons and rocky mines scattered across nearby hillsides.

The exact reasons for Felipe's move to Poroto are unclear. While there were few (if any) Chinese in the community, Felipe seems to have prospered there and again established a home and even a store on the town square as well as other properties.

This was about all I could find out about Felipe—until his will surfaced.

Sorting Facts from Legends

On one of my earlier trips to Peru, I had spent some time in Chepén trying to dig up details of Felipe's life. For so long the many Chinese immigrants

in Peru, much like other immigrants around the world, were treated like second-class citizens. Consequently, few written records have survived.

Luckily, Felipe Lám came to Peru, not as an indentured servant, but as an educated man and went on to become a successful businessman, property owner, and merchant. In Chepén I uncovered the birth certificates of his three children and located the home the Lám family had lived in during the 1920s and 1930s.

Evelina was a young girl in 1937 when Felipe died of stomach cancer at the age of fifty-six. Most mysterious of her memories of her father was that among the properties he owned was at least one mine in the western Sierra. The mountain town of Salpo was often mentioned in the sketchy and fluid retelling of stories about the mysterious mine.

Owning a mine in Peru carries with it the possibility of untold riches. The Peruvian Sierra is filled with many commercial minerals, not the least of which are gold and silver. Over the decades political upheaval and chaos have often been the norm in Peru. Evelina understood that the property, having never been formally or legally registered and then being abandoned, likely had been sold off by the government long ago. As a result she would have no existing claim to it.

Still, the mysterious story of this mine intrigued us all.

— — — — —

One day I was going through one of the many boxes of unsorted notes and files on our family histories when I came across an unexpected treasure: Felipe Lám's will.

I found it among Evelina's papers, along with Carito's tattered birth certificate and other miscellaneous papers. Looking over the thick document that comprised his will, and despite the fact that my Spanish has never been good, I immediately recognized it for what it was: *El Último Testamento de Felipe Lám* (the Last Testament of Felipe Lám).

Excited, I quickly plowed through the document. I not only learned the names of Felipe's parents but also discovered that he specifically

mentioned among his assets a mine named Las Minas Casualidad, meaning the “chance” or “hazard” mines, and included clues to its location.

In his will Felipe stated that Las Minas Casualidad was near Cerro Pingullo, also known as El Cauro. Finally I had something tangible to work with! So I immediately began searching for more details about the mine. While I had no illusions of making a claim on the mine in the name of the family, I thought that gathering more details about its history would be a wonderful addition to the family narrative. Wherever Las Minas Casualidad was, I longed to learn more about it—and perhaps someday to locate it.

Preparing to Depart

After the long bus ride from Lima, I returned to Trujillo to the home of my sister-in-law Sheila and her husband, José.

My plan was simple. I would take a bus to the mining town of Salpo and from there make my way to the high puna (plateau) hamlet of Chepén de Salpo. From Chepén, I would descend on foot to the village of Poroto. I would be hiking along the eleven-thousand-foot-high puna of the coastal Andes and then descending into and through the deep canyons leading to the Río Chepén valley. I would end my trek at Poroto—nine thousand feet lower than the Chepén in the puna.

I estimated it would be a ten-mile stroll, eight hours at the most, and all downhill. I felt supremely confident and qualified. It would be a day-long walk—a walk in the park. What could go wrong?

I foresaw no problems. A piece of cake. Simple.

The evening before my departure, as was the custom when I stayed with José and Sheila, we ate dinner together. Their cook, Flor, usually prepared a mouth-watering meal. However, to my disappointment, this night she served me liver. I really don’t like liver—not at all! And to make matters worse, this was not just a small piece of meat smothered in onions. It was a huge serving that lapped over my dinner plate on all sides.

With so many terrific Peruvian dishes available, I thought, why liver? But I love Flor's cooking, so I ate my half pound of liver with a smile. I had no idea that this liver feast would be my last solid meal for many days.

Sitting there at the family table after our meal, I told José and Sheila of my plans to head into the mountains the next morning. They weren't excited about my journey. If it had been anyone else, I think they would have made more of a fuss, but they had come to expect some impulsive, even crazy ideas from me. I assured them I would be careful and should be back in two or three days.

Afterward I went upstairs to pack my knapsack. I started with a topographical map and two compasses—it's always good to have a backup. I made sure I had a couple of knives, a large camping towel, some underwear and socks, a heavy paperback book—*The Winds of War* by Herman Wouk—a National Geographic world map, a yellow poncho, a Tilley hat, two Ziploc bags, and a plastic solar blanket. I usually carry one of these dollar-shop-quality solar blankets when I travel, although I had yet to use one and wasn't even sure how or if it would work. I also packed a small bottle of ancient military-surplus water-purification tablets encased in cracking wax, some matches, a length of nylon cord, and a razor blade. Last I threw in my iPod and camera.

I consider myself a seasoned traveler and am accustomed to austere conditions. I have suffered from typhoid, trichinosis, ticks, food poisoning, dengue (breakbone), and Guáitira fever, as well as arbitrary arrest and extortion by corrupt police officials. Looking at my gear, I felt I was overprepared, but I thought, *In Peru you can never be too careful.*

It was early spring in the Peruvian Andes, so I figured the weather shouldn't be an issue. I believed I'd come across people and settlements on my trekking route, which meant access to food, water, and shelter if I needed them.

Yeah, I'm up for this. Ten miles, five to eight hours, all downhill. A walk in the park.



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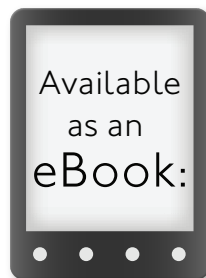
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