

# She found her roots—and a way to help

**Ana Dodson, 16**

*Evergreen, Colo.*

**SEARCHING FOR HER PAST:** Adopted from Peru as an infant, Ana Dodson lived a privileged life, attending private school, snowboarding and riding her horse Blizzard. But she longed to see her birthplace, Cuzco, where her biological mother, Maria, had lived and died. "As early as I can remember," says Ana's adoptive mom, Judi, "Ana wanted to go back."

**A DESPERATE NEED:** In 2003 Judi and Ana's dad, Rocco, took 11-year-old Ana to Cuzco. There they came across the struggling Hogar Mercedes de Jesus Molina orphanage, where nuns cared for 20 girls without such basics as hot water. "It could have been me," Ana recalls thinking.

**A HELPING HAND:** So she took up their cause. At her bat mitzvah, instead of gifts, she asked people to donate vitamins. She also began speaking at rotary clubs and churches, and in 2003 founded Peruvian Hearts ([www.peruvianhearts.org](http://www.peruvianhearts.org)). To date she's raised \$150,000, allowing the orphanage to install a hot-water system and pay private-school costs for the girls. She's also started a college scholarship fund, called Maria's Gift. "We are so thankful," says Mother Anna Yolanda, who runs the orphanage. Adds Giovana Yucra, 16, the first scholarship recipient: "Ana is my sister. She's always in my heart."

"My passion is for these kids," says Ana of the orphans she helps—and who have received school supplies thanks to her efforts.

By Vickie Bane



Know a hero? Send suggestions to [heroesamongus@peoplemag.com](mailto:heroesamongus@peoplemag.com)

