



Golden Frog

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"Ancient legend tells that in the Inca sacred lake, the Titicaca, there evolved a mystical game, that with the passage of time was made into a festival. "El Sapu" (the frog) was the main character in the exciting game where the Inca, son of the sun, would throw the luck with his court.

In those times, the royal family would throw gold pieces in the lake, with the hopes of catching some frog's attention, who were known for their magical powers. If a frog came to the surface and took in his mouth a gold piece, instantly the player was awarded a wish and the frog turned into solid gold.

In honor of so many wishes becoming reality, the Inca ordered a great golden frog made, for all of royalty to enjoy. It was a game of suspense and dexterity, where dance and happiness would mix in one rite:

PUKLLAY SAPU (Playing Sapo, or Frog)."



The rest of the story is about how the Sapo games journeyed to my daughter's home in Tucson.

Posted in Santiago, Chile, our company opened offices in Lima Peru, Rio de Janeiro, and Buenos Aires. The search for copper necessarily explores those geologic formations where copper is known. My travels returned me to Peru, where I worked a summer job camped in the Sechura Desert, 1961 and fresh out of high school, travels implied new experiences. The Sunday promenade in the *Plaza de Armas* central square and visits to the higher country where anti-American sentiment louded the bars and restaurants every night. By accident, my eyes found a few mug-holding fellows tossing a brass token some seven meters away from a box with a frog on the top. Shouts and oh "darn" echoed off the bar walls. Later, I learned that this was a game of Sapo. No idea, did I have what this was.

In 1996, on my initial visit to the Lima office, the staff showed me the game over a lunch hour. Not lawn darts, crochet, or anything I might have seen, Sapo was a game to have in our new Santiago residence. The box arrived at the office carefully wrapped for shipping.

Check-in for the flight to Chile is around one am to arrive in Santiago around 5:30 local time. Hike from the gate, pass immigration, find a cart to lug the luggage, and head toward Customs. All in Spanish, mind you, and my accent never masked my country of origin.

"Good morning, sir. Do you have anything to declare?"

Yes

May I see it?

Of course, it is this box right here.

Nothing else, sir, may I know what this is?"

It is a Sapo game, from Peru

A what? He asked, hiding a hint of a smile

Yes, here is the receipt

Oh, you have a receipt for this Sapo !

Yes, sir, it is for my personal use.

Laughter attracts a few other agents, and they ask me again to explain.

After repeating my words, I said I plan to use it at home for parties and fun.

Not too busy is the airport in pre-dawn hours. The group, now pounding their thighs in perfect timing with their robust laughs.

I am puzzled,

He said a *Sapo*, *you have a receipt for your personal use and parties.* Oh, just go!

The laughter dies with the distance I walk away to find my taxi.

I recounted the events to one of our senior Chilean geologists a few days later. A smile followed by that unmistakable face of You really do not understand, do you?

He explains that the word for Frog is Renia, and in Chile, Sapo means a woman's private parts. I have the receipt for personal use and at parties in this container. OMG, telling language guffaws on one's self is ok.

Oh my. I never could play that game without an embarrassed grin. Over the years, complete with a strong top, the game supported a small printing press, became a small serving

table, and provided sturdy storage. They Family, grandkids too, enjoyed this novel game.



Now, it passed on to another generation without any knowledge of the history of this particular game. So much the better!

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