To the Proud Owner of This Tapestry:

Congratulations! The tapestry you have purchased or received as a gift was hand-woven on a locally made wooden loom by the indigenous Salasacan Indians, who live in the highlands of Ecuador. For centuries, the Salasacans have handloomedavings with designs depicting real and mythological elements of their culture dating back to Incan and pre-Incan times, and other designs incorporating elements of their everyday life.

The woof (heavy yarn, 90% of the tapestry) is made of sheep's wool, which is colorfast-dyed before weaving; the warp (fine threads, 10% of the tapestry) is of cotton. The technique used in making these tapestries is a refined version of the basic weaving skill by which the Indians have woven their clothing down through the centuries.

In the early 1960's, the Salasacans began to augment their minimal earnings by marketing their tapestries. The tapestries borrow designs from the woven sash-belts, worn by both men and women, which are part of their native dress. The tapestries are displayed in museums and art galleries throughout the world, and stores purchase them as gift items.

The Salasacan Indians of Ecuador

The community of Salasaca is located at approximately 8,850 feet above sea level in the central part of the Ecuadorian highlands, about 100 miles south of the equator. Its inhabitants, the Salasacan Indians, speak Quichua, the language of their Incan emperors of pre-colonial days. The Salasacans are believed to have lived originally in Bolivia, and to have been moved to Ecuador by the Incas about 1532, in order to help expand the Incan Empire and dominate new territories.

The Salasacans live on a stretch of dry, sandy land about one and one-fourth mile wide and four and one-half miles long. They have survived on their small parcels of land by means of subsistence agriculture, channeling irrigation water from the nearby river. They have remained very close to the earth, and as a result have learned many of the secrets that nature has hidden within it.

In spite of the fact that they are surrounded by other groups of Indians and people of Spanish cultural descent, the Salasacans have maintained themselves as a distinct ethnic group, preserving their own customs, dress, language and identity, and marking a sharp contrast with other ethnic groups of the country. They have never allowed themselves to be subjugated and have defended their lands against penetration by whites with rigor. Only in the mid-twentieth century has it been possible for whites to enter the community without fear of reprisal. This change came about largely through the influence of the Catholic mission school and the persistent efforts of Peace Corps volunteers, who gradually won their trust over a period of years.