In small-scale societies around the world today we observe two 'silent' health crises the causes of which are unknown: extraordinarily high susceptibility to infectious diseases, and an increasing prevalence of asthma and allergies in those groups that undergo acculturation. Are these health problems related to one another, and if so how, and why? In this talk I propose that we may begin to find answers to these questions by taking a close look at the relationships between parasites and trauma, and the immunologically and culturally-mediated trade-offs that natives of Lowland South America face in their attempts to defend themselves against the wrath of these health hazards. More specifically, I explore 1) the causes of a biased T-helper 2 cell response in these populations; 2) the effects of this bias on susceptibility to infectious diseases and to asthma; and 3) the cultural adaptations that help to mitigate these effects.