

From the Helm
Walnut Street, Kentucky
June 01-11, 2009

From the Helm – Saturday, May 30, 2009

For a day that had a “planned” ending just after Noon, this one dragged out til 7:30 this evening.

The morning went along smoothly. Final list analysis was done. Bus was ordered for Monday. Trip crew was established and documented. We picked up the Yamaha man and made our way to the *Beatriz*. My, she is beautiful. The fresh varnish and other paint make all the difference in the world.

When we arrived, the main engine was ready for testing. We took an hour cruise putting it through the paces. Real fine. After a few minor adjustments, I signed off on the service work and fueling began. She took on a 4,536 liter load of diesel and 409 in gasoline. She’s now heavy and proud of it!

Both Phillip and William called me at different times during the day. It was good to hear their voices. No problems. They just called to say “hey”. Made the day even better on my end...

I’m grateful the day is about unwound. It’s been yet another good one. The only plan I have for tomorrow is a morning meeting at 9 o’clock. The rest will just be the rest. Maybe write a bit; read a bit; maybe neither...

From the Helm – Sunday, May 31, 2009

Thank God, *today* is the only day I’ve been given responsibility to live in. The finite nature of the word itself is comforting to me. How I’ve chosen to walk through it will determine the joy or remorse in any reflections on the past God may grant me in the future.

For some reason, I’ve been pondering the significance and relevance of time a bit more these days – what’s important and what’s not. My mind is far too simple a mass to theorize. So, I’ve just lightly ponder...

Recently, a number of people have shared with me frustration over what to do in certain circumstances they face. These range from divorce proceedings, conflicts at work to caring for aging parents. In each case, I know the right decisions are being sought.

What's come to me through it all is a clearer picture of how things should be in *my own* life; my *perception* of things in contrast to my *reality* in God's greater plan. The resulting clarity has both reassured and humbled me.

- My own wisdom, freestanding and of itself, is limited to my perception of personal need. Thus, my decisions will be based on how I see things affecting my personal wellbeing. Perception of my own wellbeing rarely involves the here and now because urgent matters require little more than basic instinct to address. It usually regards my future. Therefore, my own wisdom usually leads me to lofty, unrealistic action in the present, regarding my future. Every now and again I'll luck out and do something selfless along the way. But, this proves to be the exception, not the rule.

As God enters the picture, my perception and dependence shift in a polar way. The introduction of *His* wisdom, as apposed to my own, changes absolutely everything. His presence simplifies and smoothes my perception of all I'll see – effecting all I'll do.

In the old days, I'd fail to see the beauty of life. This was facilitated by the dissatisfaction I felt regarding my own person. I'd sought all the things in life that *appeared* to bring satisfaction to those around me. The problem was I was trying to dress my life up over a shell that had no idea of life's purpose. Success, by any definition, was unachievable.

I caught myself up in a fantasy that would necessarily have to end if true happiness were to be had. The unfortunate part of the deal was: The fantasy became easier than the simplicity of reality – for the moment, far less threatening.

You see, I set myself up in a life situation that teetered on a thin beam. On the one side was a person I didn't know – one yet undeveloped due to the fear of what I'd find or not find. On the other, a person I felt I could create by the sheer power of my will - one created at any cost to me and those around me. This path led to the only possible outcome – the destruction of its own creator.

It took many years to reach the point of collapse. I was more stubborn than most. Fueled by self-will, the miseries quickly outweigh the positives in my life. However, I *knew* I'd make the right move that'd right all the wrongs, just around the next corner. The corners came and went in abundance. The right moves never did...

A person can handle only so much of this phenomenon before a little help is needed to overcome the anger, bitterness and contempt that comes with the territory. This is where the “normal” individual seeks the Light; surrenders to the Solution and begins again on solid ground. For a few of us though, other more temporary solutions must be explored in absurd, almost inhuman proportions.

One of the great blessings that's come through the existence I once occupied are the many “tapes” stored in what remains of my mind. Tapes I can quickly run through to

their end, exposing the folly of a contemplated thought or action. Scripture tells me I'm enticed by *my own* desire for things. I need no greater tempter – my simple mind is right sized for the task.

A further blessing is the recognition that God was *always* there. He'd *not* abandoned me. By His Grace, He allowed me to reach the point at which I could see a *relationship* with Him was not only possible but, was the beginning of all that matters. He was the Solution from the beginning. He's the only Wisdom that exists. He's the Breathe and Reason of life itself.

So, anything I may have to offer those placed in my path is nothing of me at all. God's Wisdom comes only to those relieved from the bondage of self, completely. This can only take place through absolute surrender to His direction. And these, only by His grace. God's grace is dispensed by His sovereignty. If He so chooses these things for me, it *is* available to *all* who seek Him. But, seek we must. Seeking and obeying is our part. In this area, we may successfully exercise our will to any degree we choose.

I'm quite ineffective when I try to share what's happened in *someone else's* life. Man can only truly share from *his own* experiences. These experiences are Divinely permitted to occur – coincidence is a myth.

God has allowed me to live this day. All I've seen, as He's carried me, was to enhance my dependence on and gratitude toward Him. Further, all I've seen was intended to help point *someone else*, in His direction - I've just had the benefit of living it in the process. The comforting part is: I don't have to hunt anybody down. God gently crosses our paths along the days as He unfolds them. What a beautiful way to live. What a simple deal it is. Sweet in every way...

It's been a fine Sunday, indeed...

From the Helm – Monday, June 01, 2009

5:30 AM - I slept well last night. The *Beatriz* is ready. The rain is pouring down outside. I love it...

The group is scheduled to arrive at around midnight, tonight. We should be able to depart as soon as all are aboard. It's time to cruise.

I spoke with Edno last night. He's excited about our arrival. Our rendezvous is set for mid to late afternoon, tomorrow. The people of Sagrado eagerly await us. I eagerly await them.

I'm humbled to be counted among those privileged to make this journey in to the *Valley*. Due to the high water levels we'll be able to reach deeper, visiting a new community. It's what we do. It's what I love to do.

The team is bringing our sat system with them. It's been checked out by our service provider in Nashville. In the morning, all communications aboard should be up and running. I look forward to sharing the days as they unfold. I'm ready to go...

(June 1, 2009 - continued)

4:00 PM – I arrive aboard at one o'clock; unpacked to my room. It's good to be home...

The Crew is rested. The married ones took Saturday afternoon and Sunday off. We're all itching to get underway. Amadeu had some lunch saved for me when I got here. It was good.

The meds we picked up are inventories and shelved. The secondary vessels are all fueled and serviced.

- I just talked to Dad and a couple of friends back home. They'll all be praying. When I'm told I'm being prayed for, my demeanor changes – It quiets me. The prayers of many have helped me along the way even in the times I gave them no regard. Today, a person praying for me is the best gift I could receive. When someone intercedes on the behalf of another, the value is greater than precious stones. It's of eternal value. Beautiful, indeed...

- It'll be good to see Rusty, David, Pat, Steve and all the rest. These are a unique collective of incredible individuals. I look forward to quiet talks of which there will be many – there usually are.

7:00 PM – Just had dinner. All the Interps are now aboard. It's good to see them again. They are Raimundo, Marlio, Mr. Jason, Daniel and Jackly. Jackly is new. He's a pharmacy student here in Manaus – should work our real well in medical.

Maybe all can get some rest before departure. The only thing missing now is the Team. I'm tired. I think I'll nap a bit. The next opportunity probably won't be til after dawn.

From the Helm – Wednesday, June 3, 2009

2:30 AM – We just dropped anchor off Sagrado. The stars are out. Beautiful sight to wake up to.

- The team arrived on time last night. Most were through the doors of the airport by 1:00 AM. All but one bag made it. Another key missing item was Ron Dunn! We waited till everyone on the flight had come out of customs – no Ron...

When we arrive on the Beatriz, I called him and found he'd gotten to the airport in Memphis to find his Visa had expired and was turned back. By the time I reached him,

he'd already rebooked his flight and reapplied with the Brazilian Consulate. He's scheduled to arrive June 13th to join our next team from Oklahoma and Arkansas – good deal.

- We left home port at 2:00 AM, sharp. Just as we were approaching the meeting of the waters, our big generator experienced an airlock (common occurrence). When the lines were bled, the started failed (less-than common occurrence...). After an hour or so of attempts to correct the deal, I sent back to the *AMOR/Lori* for a new starter. By 5:30 AM, the new starter was installed. Still no go. We then sent for our electrician in town who groggily came out to where we were idling and got us up and going by eight. Underway at last...

- It was a comfortable day of cruising. The clouds have made things nice. No rain, just cool sailing.

Between catnaps here and there, it's been a day of catching up with old friends. I've been able to sit with several as they rotated places in the seats on the bow. It's been good.

I'm looking forward to spending some time with Pr. Edno these days. Our project here in Sagrado will be another attempt at drilling him a well. In a few hours, we'll see just how that goes.

I look forward to the day. I love the people of Sagrado. I've been scheduled to do an inordinate number of eye surgeries first thing this morning. Better sharpen the old knife a bit. Thank You, Lord, for safe travel. Thank You for landing me back in the Valley once more...

From the Helm – Thursday, June 04, 2009

4:00 AM – As we came ashore yesterday morning, Sagrado was alive with people of all ages singing and waving to us. As we climbed the 46 steps to the village compound, the children threw flower petals, giggled, cried and hugged us. Unreal welcome...

So many familiar faces. Many we left as children just last year, now suddenly older. Some of the older ones, now noticeably absent – the fruits of time...

The community and church here have worked tirelessly for many days and nights preparing for our arrival and brief visit. Their expressions of love touched us all aboard the *Beatriz*. Expressions born of hope and love – two elements absent when we first arrived five years ago this month. The transformation God's presence embodies is remarkable and unquestionable. Beautiful indeed.

- All teams were on location and working by 8 o'clock. After a few hours setting up, drilling of the well began. The going is quite slow – potter's clay through the first 3 rods. This one will take a while.

VBS had the usual big crowd. Saulo and his mother worked beautifully with the children. Medical was able to attend to all that were waiting. Dental did what dental does... I did a couple of eyes and scheduled several more for this morning. By day's end, all are well, at peace and tired.

- The service was a blessing. The church building is beautiful. The members here have poured concrete, painted and planted. There is a spirit of brotherhood and purpose in this place. Edno has followed God's calling to this area and it shows. I love that man and his family. He's an unwitting mentor in obedience for me. I observe and learn.

- It rained off and on all night last night. The tarps are down and the team is sleeping comfortably. Soon, this day will begin for us all. I'm grateful to have lived to at least see it's beginning this morning. What an awesome place and time to be alive. Thank You, Lord, for yet another one to walk through...

From the Helm – Thursday, June 04, 2009

Noon - My, my. Quite a morning. All teams on location tending to the day by 8:30. The well drilling team continues with its slow but steady struggle. Dental and medical are enjoying their usual continuum. VBS was a joy. I was able to slide through another couple of eye deals causing no known loss of life or serious brain damage. All is well...

There's been a light drizzle all day long. Just enough to keep things cool and muddy. It's unusual to see steady rain this time of year. I'm grateful for it though.

- I had a little awakening this morning. While I was visiting VBS, one of the 87,321 little girls I've fallen in love here in the *Valley* came and sat down by me. I've watched Gabriela grow up over the past 5 years. She is now 12 and I've always assumed she'd understood the Gospel as it's been shared each year. I know better than to assume much of anything any more – But, I still do so from time to time just to keep things interesting.

Gabi made the statement she'd not accepted Christ as her savior yet because she was Catholic. After a numbing moment of silence, I proceeded to explain the deal so she'd see the difference between religious affiliation and a relationship with her Creator. She grew serious but still remained steadfast in her argument.

You know, we come to these far reaches to share Simple Truth. We strive to be clear that Christ is the primary relationship any of us needs for our world and reality to change – be made whole. We come back year after year with no variation in our message. However, it is clear, God's Spirit moves as and when it moves – independent of our human strivings. All I am to do is plant the seeds through sharing what God's done in and for me in hopes it will shed light to those around me. I will pray in earnest that the eyes of Gabi's heart will open to the light. She is precious to me but far more precious to God – it will happen in due time...

10:00 PM – The well was a partial success. We went ahead and left a high-water well functioning and will come back in low water to go another 30 feet. Eventually, it will work out...

- All teams finished out the day well. Medical, dental and glasses had seen everyone in line by 5:30. By six, all was bagged out to the *Beatriz*. It's been two incredible days with our family of Sagrado.

We just got in from a touching farewell service onshore. The entire community was present. They read poems to us and showered us with gifts of fruit, tapioca and farinha. Humbling... I could stay here the remainder of the trip. These people are special to my heart indeed. But if I stayed, I'd miss all God has for me along the way. It's time to move on. Thank You, Lord for the day. Thank You for these people you've placed in my life. The joy and peace in my heart this moment is beyond description. Thank You...

We are set to depart for Cucui at dawn with the AMOR/Tereza in tow. I'm more than ready to slip in to my hammock. I'm tired. It's all been good...

From the Helm – Friday, June 5, 2009

We were underway at 5:30 this morning. The night granted us moon and stars til the rains came in the wee hours. I slept so soundly, the lowering of the tarps was barely noticeable.

The cruise to Cucui was beautiful. The river runs at a good clip this far in to the headwaters - A surreal image as the channel tightens and the banks grow close. I Love this...

Arrived at Cucui and all was set and running by 8 o'clock. The river is so high, only the cap of the village (church, soccer field and a few houses) remains somewhat dry. The health of this region, both physical and psichological, is altered by its confinement. The people seem needier of a carrying touch of the hand. I'm grateful God has allowed us to be that hand today.

By early afternoon, the clouds were darkening to the west bringing with them a quiet, steady rain. Clusters of people huddled under trees and the eaves of the church and surrounding houses. There were two young people wanting to be baptized by Rusty. It had to be postponed due to the rains. With the darkening sky, all sorts of undesirable little creatures come home to the shallows thinking night has come – not a good time or place to be wading around in the shallows... God willing, there will be another day for the baptisms.

Medical, dental and eyes worked throughout the day, seeing our last at 6 this evening. Construction left the well operating back in Sagrado and was able to partially enclose Joquim's house here in Cucui. It's been a long, wet, tiring and gratifying day. However,

thanks to our crew, we were spared the chiggers this time. As each of us disembarked the *Beatriz*, they rubbed our ankles and feet with diesel. Works every time.

- The service this evening was a good close for the day. A big boat load traveled several hours from Sagrado to be with us. These people are so neat. Their simplicity and genuine sincerity is humbling. It challenges me to self-examination. It keeps motive and purpose in perspective. For some reason, it's easier to do so out here.

10:30 PM – Well, it's all said and done for today. Our team is well. All are healthy, well fed and chiggerless. We're on a slow cruise further up the path to Mount Horeb. Have no clue where that is. I've just been told it's much deeper in. My how I cherish these days. How beautiful it all is to me...

From the Helm – Saturday, June 06, 2009

My body seems to have returned to its normal schedule. I was able to hit the hammock by 9:30 last night and awake at 3:30, fully restored. It's just taken a few days to adjust.

We anchored late last night about an hour from Mt. Horeb. The dawn revealed the narrow channel we'd come to. Fog hung low and thick. Led by the *AMOR/Tereza*, we idled through a maze of tree tops and brush, finally arriving at the village.

What a beautiful, isolated place. The entire grounds here are of lush grass – none of the mud and slush we've grown to expect this time around. I've never been here before but upon mingling with the few that were onshore to meet us, I felt at ease, familiar.

- All teams were set up and tending to things by 8 o'clock. The rains seemed to settle in early and simply remained.

The people here are pleasant, helpful and giving. As we were setting up our clinics, the ladies were stoking fires and cleaning fish to cook and feed to the crowds that were accumulating. It was interesting to see how they collectively tended to their collective needs. This is something I've more commonly seen among the indigenous nations. It's refreshing to see it out here as well.

- By early afternoon, our construction team had built a low wall around a young couples house to help corral the babies. When we went earlier to meet them and see what would be involved in the project, the young mother was half reclining on the floor with a breast exposed as her two toddlers ran about the patio alternating stops for a quick snack. It was a beautiful snapshot of trust and provision for my mind's eye. Good way to start the day...

A hunter came by with his kill from last night: 3 wild bores, an armadillo and a Paca. I bought it all. My crew now has something special to take home to mama this trip! As for me, I'll stick to what Filipino fixes out of our freezers and keep my eye out for some Tucupi pepper sauce or maybe some fresh tapioca along the way...

By 5 PM, all that appeared for us to do was done. No one was left unattended in the clinics and construction was able to fix the steps of the school as an added help to the community. VBS enjoyed two sessions with a well behaved crowd of absolutely beautiful children. The daylight hours ended well.

- Pastor Pedro brought the message this evening. No public decisions but the crowd were attentive and engaged. At the closing, an older gentleman, Moises, came to the front to let us know that he will give land and provide the brute lumber to build a temple of worship here. He's the patriarch of the region – this is a meaningful gesture. Edno has been visiting here for some time now. God has softened hearts through his presence. Yet another place and people we can now call friends and family...

- Had a surprise Birthday party for Rusty after the service! He's tough to surprise 'cause he's always the first in line for food and snacks!! But we were able to bluff and stall him anyway. It all worked perfectly.

We'll stay here tonight. Exiting under darkness wouldn't be the wisest choice to make. The crew will get a good night's sleep. We'll set out for Arrozal in the morning at first sign of light. It's been quite a day. A good one indeed...

From the Helm – Sunday, June 07, 2009

3:30 AM – Got up a few minutes ago. The coffee was already waiting on my table downstairs. The smell of fresh bread almost overcoming the diesel. A heavy mist throughout the lower deck – another foggy morning.

I awoke several times with disconnected thoughts regarding unconnected things. I take this for what is – either a thing I should be doing or a thing I should surrender... It'll all fall in to place as the day unfolds. No need to search for something not yet lost.

11:00 AM – All teams were ashore at 8 this morning. I hadn't remembered this setting until I saw it again a few hours ago. The trip to and the appearance of Arrozal is different due to water level. Most every point of reference along the way is submerged. In all my life I've not seen the *Valley* so covered. Still breathtakingly beautiful; just different.

The teams are about to break for lunch. It's been a great morning. Teudorique, the pastor here, is young and energetic. He's asked for some time with me this afternoon. I look forward to it. He's got a lovely wife and 4 enchanting little daughters ages 2 to 7. Another one's due in October. The last time I saw him I'd jokingly told him if she got pregnant again I'd perform one of my famed, rusty knife vasectomies on him. I'd forgotten all about it until his *wife* reminded me. Poor, poor Teudorique...

7:00 PM – We just arrived from an early service. Our time here in Arrozal has run out – the crew is preparing for the slow cruise to St. Antonio.

The afternoon was tedious but good. Construction took the afternoon to relax and take in the other ministries they seldom have the opportunity to see taking place. Dental and medical worked steadily until work was no longer possible.

The service was led by Luiza this time. She brought a simple message that was well received. Arrozal is a tired, depressed community. It is isolated from the rest of Lago Preto in ways I've yet to decipher. The world has a strong grip on these people. Many young mothers, barely teenagers; few known fathers completing the family picture. Sad indeed.

Teudorique pulled me aside and asked for prayer. He feels terribly alone here. His struggles are many. I introduced him to Pedro – that relationship will be helpful on many levels. The church building is in disrepair so I had 20 sheets of roofing offloaded to his boat. It's all I had to offer. I have and will continue to pray as often as he and his people come to mind. He'll be ok. Life is not always the kindest of companions, but it never fails to be the constant.

- It's time to lay this body down for awhile. The moon is full and the clouds are being kind to my view of the stars from the hammock. What a beautiful sight. It disarms my petty concerns and soothes my spirit. Thank You, Lord, for such a tapestry tonight – I know it's just for me... Thank You indeed...

From the Helm – Monday, June 8, 2009

5:15 AM – Sleep was sweet. St. Antonio looms high on the hillside as the sun rises. We arrived sometime in the night. I didn't stir at all.

This place is another one with a history of ups and downs. A community with clear presences of good and evil – light and darkness. Many times, the only real peace I've sensed here is that which abides in my own soul. One of the more difficult things I do in life is watch as people struggle needlessly. However, one of the easiest things I do is realize I need but offer hope and be available as God leads.

3:00 PM - It's been a good day in all respects. The church building here fell victim to arson earlier in the year – just one of those bumps along the days as they've unfolded... Our construction team has jumped at the opportunity to begin the rebuilding process. They've been excited throughout the day with the task at hand. I love it.

- VBS had a good crowd of little beauties. Dulce, Saulo, Chris and Angela interact so well with these angles. I've enjoyed watching it all from clinic. Dulce relates in a wonderful way through her stories, expressions and simplicity. It's all a joy to watch.

- David set up the compressor and drills and was able to fill a number of teeth. Among these he was able to get both Luiza and Edno fixed up. It's really cool to have restorative ability when time and opportunity permits.

- Medical had an emergency come in right as the dinner bell was ringing. A 4 year-old girl and her two-year-old brother were playing with a machete over in Sagrado. The result was devastating. As the family was passing by St. Antonio, they saw the *Beatriz* and came ashore. The little girl's ear was no longer attached as God had originally designed the deal – horrible thing to witness. Within a couple of hours, our medical team had performed the deed and she looked beautiful once again (even with the couple dozen stitches). You know, it's through occurrences such as these I'm blessed with the renewed assurance that as long as I follow where God makes clear the path, on any given day I'll be just where He'll match need with provision. It's good to so often *see* this as well as know it in my heart...

9:30 PM – We've just arrived at anchor for the night to find we've been relieved of said anchor. Well, well, well... I spent the first 15 minutes plotting a myriad of evil little deeds to inflict upon the poor soul who chose to temp my wrath! These ranged from the performance of a number of unnecessary surgical procedures to, the more overt gutting and sinking of the body (that's my crew's preferred and favorite choice...). After indulging my "little mad scientist" persona for a bit, the course the action to be taken became clear – no action whatever. The perpetrator will ultimately be spanked by a much stronger hand than mine...

- Now it's time to rest this old body, maybe entertain another moment or two of sweet revenge and then, fade away. Our last day on location will dawn soon. I look forward to it all, indeed.

From the Helm – Tuesday, June 9, 2009

11:00 PM – We just tied off in the cove. Our final day on location is finished. It's been long and eventful. It's been one that's seemed to encompass every range of experience and emotion.

Soon after the day started, a young lady sat in my chair that would soon occupy the hearts and minds of many of our team.

Her name is Jelly. She's lived right here in St. Antonio all her life but in all the times I've visited, I'd yet to see here. She's twenty years old, beautiful. Her life reads like a tragedy.

The first thing I noticed was some finger movement indicative of maybe mild autism. She seemed detached yet compliant; somewhat lethargic. I didn't think much of the deal until I'd finished pulling a couple of her teeth and she was leaving the room. Anita came to me from medical with tears in her eyes and the beginnings of a story to tell. Jelly's reality soon became the focus of the remainder of the day.

She is epileptic. Emotionally, stalled between age 12 or 14; suffers fits of rage; lives alone in the back of the village. Her occasional fits and aloofness scare the children and

anger the adults. The men of the community, when not seeking easy pleasure with her, have risen up in indignant self-righteousness to take her life. It's a sad, perverse situation.

Rusty, Anita, Edno and I visited with her at length. She not crazy. We came to know a scared and lonely child destined to remain that way if love, patience and acceptance were not express in her favor. By the end of our first visit, she'd accepted Christ in the child-like manner and understanding that makes it easy – at least her aloneness and eternity were resolve right then and there.

Through the remainder of the day, I was graced with several of the men who've abused her, along with the president of the community sitting in my chair. I had their undivided attention for as long as I chose. I feel this was the “proper” use of my temporary ability to control their lives. There are *now* at least a couple of guys that won't be bothering her anymore with a clear conscious and the president has committed to making sure she gets and takes her medication every day. At least it's a start...

The construction team fixed up her house with the remaining materials we had onboard and my chef fixed her up with a cupboard full of simple goodies. If there were any feasibility in the thought, I believe Rusty would be taking Pam home a new daughter to raise. I guess he's not the only one who felt the protective instinct peaking. She'll be ok...

- As we were closing down and bagging out to the *Beatriz* this evening, a storm slowly developed out of the west. This is a dangerous direction. One that demands respect and action. Just as the winds picked up, we were tied off from three directions ready to wait it out. In the middle of the deal, Cilene and a boat load showed up in a canoe all the way from Sagrado! They all visited, giggled and exchanged pictures till we docked for the service at 8:45. It was great watching the interaction.

- Rusty preached a good sermon tonight. I've looked forward to hearing from him. Walnut Street has no idea the depth of the man God's given them. Someone to be loved cherished and respected – not really any other option in the deal. I know of many a church that'd be bettered by his presence and leadership. If I had my druthers' I'd find him one closer to me. He's a dear friend indeed...

- Well, the day is done. Our time on location is done. All that remains is all that remains as we cruise homeward at first light. A time for reflection and fellowship I always enjoy. I look forward to it.

From the Helm – Wednesday, June 10, 2009

10:30 AM - Our main engine cranked at 5 this morning. We are now underway toward Manaus. ETA is set for eleven tomorrow morning.

We spent several hours enjoying the company of Edno, his family and the others of his team. As always, when we separated, the tears were many. A beautiful family...

Now we look only to the slow cruise ahead and the relaxation it might bring. I'm grateful for all that took place over the days. I look forward to *this* day. The Lord permitting, *From the Helm* will continue as life makes it possible. Thank You, Lord, for the privilege. Thank You for the protection, grace, love and mercy. You've once again shown these things in great abundance...

From the Helm – Thursday, June 11, 2009

4:00 AM – It's been an absolutely gorgeous night. The moon is high; the stars, breathtaking...

Yesterday, all aboard spent the day chatting in small groups here and there. I enjoyed my time on the bow, people shifting in and out of the chairs around me. It was all good.

I spent some time with a couple of dear friends; gleaned some insight from variations of my own story. We all have struggles from time to time. The balance of a man is in the choices he makes when choice is required. The character of a man lies in the nature and consistency of his choices, the pattern over time. This is where some derivative of wisdom comes in to play. It's the same deal for each of us.

- One of the more challenging of times for me is when visiting with young people. I love them. I guess that's why it's challenging. When I'm asked about the things of life, I sometimes forget how shocking mine has been in contrast to many just starting out. The contrast of a normal mindset as apposed to a decidedly abnormal one. The things they struggle with are those same things I failed at so completely – relationships and the like. Temperance and often *absence* of word is best. I wouldn't dare relieve them of a struggle leading to the Essence of life. But I'm sure tempted to. Protection isn't always the best course of action but it's an action I often withhold, painfully ...

Another uncomfortable time is when I'm paid a complement of any kind. It's a natural thing for me to point out the virtues I see in others. It's natural for me to hug, kiss and otherwise embrace those around me. Often, these are the only expressions I'm capable of. When they are reciprocated though, I'm sometimes overcome by a complex, indescribable weight – very uncomfortable.

On the one hand, I crave the attention – for an instant, my heart races and utopia seems at hand. This is *immediately* followed, however, by an intense urge to withdraw; to live out the remainder of the day in silence and solitude. It's a strange push and pull within me, the nature of which is clear: I have the propensity to think highly of myself! My main struggle in life has been this undue concentration on self and all it's demands. My main *chore* each day is a "great divorce" that *must* take place within me in order to see God's ways as He reveals them. Many days, this process is either unsuccessful or incomplete; Days I can gently twist the unacceptable in to odd distortions of acceptability. It is on

such days God's presence is noticeably subdued – days producing irritability and discontentment. Days best left unvisited...

So, what's to do about it all?! I have no clue... For today, I guess I'll just be grateful to recognize a thing now and then. Things He will sort out as I draw near to Him. There's no great secret or mystery to it. Seek and I will find. Draw near and He'll do the same. As I'm faithful to my part, He will reveal *all* I need to know to make it through yet another day. All I need to know is best left to His discretion - Always...

11:00 PM – The group should be in the air in an hour or so. A beautiful collection they are, indeed... Thank You, Lord, for this whole great deal you've allowed me to live. Thank you for allowing confusion, yielding to Your clarity. Thank You for allowing the pain which leads to peace through dependence. Thank You for allowing me to struggle with things for a time so the futility of such times becomes clear. Thank You for it all, indeed...

From David to Karen:

Hi Karen they boyd gave me a surprise cake and party last night after I talked to you' It was strange having an anniversary party and no you. I really do love and miss you now that we have talked and I am rested. I appreciated you so much and thank you for putting up with me and my quirks all these years, 47 years. I look forward to being with you and will gladly clean up the wax for a repeat performance. Hope this doesn't make the blog, if it does that ok then everyone can know how much I do love and appreciate you, they will have to figure out the wax. See you soon. Q-*-.

From the Helm – Friday, June 12, 2009

Happy Valentine's Day! It's strange I have the opportunity to reflect on "relationships" on *two* official days, in *two* different countries. Talk about twice the cluelessness...

On a day *most* probably celebrate the beauty and wonder of relationships, I'm markedly reduced to amends. The greatest of these, owed to the wonderful creation that unwittingly loved and trusted me enough to bear my children...

You see, my development along the lines of romance stagnated at a very early age. I became so hopelessly lost regarding *love* that I yielded to the more understandable *feelings* of infatuation and desire. I soon developed a good grip indeed on the primal instinct of looking out for myself - only myself.

Barely in to my teens, the "idea" of certain things far outweighed their benefit in reality. The greatest of these came in relating to women. I was drawn to them all but, at the same time, feared the resulting closeness required to be substantive. My decision to seek their closeness while allowing them nothing of me in return, guaranteed the multiple failures that ensued. The sad part of the deal was the hurt caused by my indifference. The baffling part is that I was able to live that way as long as I did. Actually, I couldn't. Oblivion, by any means, was easier than correction...

Today, I realize my malady was spiritual in nature. Without what *only* God could have provided me, I had no hope of being anything of value to anyone else. My indignation over what God might reduce me to if I sought Him, fueled me on the path of ignorance and ambiguity. I thus allowed myself *no* possibility of fulfillment, happiness or sustained survival. I became a true, subtle master of misery for all who dared come close, particularly me.

It's been a long road to sanity and the beginnings of a life. By God's grace, the thrill of it doesn't wane. I'm excited to wake up each morning. I feel kind of childlike and giggly about things that used to sour me. I've no need of being guarded anymore. I'm usually at peace with the person within me. Today, that person is the same one visible to most everyone.

My self-worth comes by way of Christ's sacrifice on my behalf. My security and comfort, by way of absolute dependence upon His grace, mercy, love and provision. The hint of understanding given me of His love for me has led to a glimpse of what love truly is; what it truly should be. I'm far from "healed" in the relational arena. I've barely been elevated to the "harmless" stage. I'm good with it there. It's good enough for me.

To the lady that mothered my children and cared for me unconditionally over those many years, I say "Thank you". For my failure to appreciate her and my inability to reciprocate in kind, I say, "I'm sorry". I salute her long suffering. I thank her for our boys. I commend her for the strength and resolve in the choices she's had to make.

Happy Valentine's Day, Babe. Happy Valentine's Day, indeed...