

Arkadelphia, 2008

From the Helm – Wednesday, July 09, 2008

It's 3:30 PM and we just entered the Parana da Eva. Our new ETA for Foz do Canuma is set for about 4 tomorrow morning.

We got a later start than we had planned out of Manaus. The Arkadelphia Team arrived on schedule but we were missing a couple of bags. After sleeping at anchor, some essentials were purchased in town and we finally set sail at 11:00 AM.

The team has rested and eaten well since their arrival. I've had a chance to visit with some old friends. It's been nice.

The Negro River has been a bit upset throughout our cruise thus far. Strong winds out of the East have made for a rougher ride than usual. However the breeze has been refreshing. All part of the deal sometimes. The sun will slip away in a couple of hours bringing the calm of night. I look forward to a night of rest.

Our satellite phone is still down. Bill brought me a new modem to install but support in Nashville is having a time helping me program the thing. I no longer have a cell signal to communicate with them. So, unless I find a land line along the way, we'll just have to do without voice capability once again this trip. At least the internet is still up and running. If for some reason email fails as well, I guess we'll catch up with the world when we return to Manaus next week, just like in the old days. Email from the ends of the earth – My, my. How things have changed...

Form the Helm – Thursday, July 10, 2008

1:30 PM – We arrived and anchored off Foz do Canuma at 3:30 this morning. At dawn, we rendezvoused with Abraham and set sail for Mamia. ETA is approximately 5 PM.

It has been a good day of cruising. Shortly after passing Kwata (the Capitol), we headed west on the Mamia River. We've taken several wrong turns along the way. This river is narrow with many fingers that lead nowhere. We are finally on the stretch where all channels have merged into only one. It should be harder to get lost from this point on – “should be”...

The *AMOR/ Betty* is under tow along side the *Beatriz*. I've had time to visit with Abraham and his family this morning. He is dealing well with the loss of his father. It was good to just sit and let him talk it through. We look forward to spending a few days together on the river.

5:00 PM – Still a ways from Mamia. The river up here is absolutely beautiful. It is so smooth it's difficult to distinguish between the horizon and its reflections – breathtaking indeed.

The plan is still to have services this evening if we arrive in time to gather the people. It will be good either way. A devotional onboard will go down just as nicely.

The day has been one of sorting supplies and separating clothing to be given away. A lot of time spent on the bow taking in the scenery as well. My soul is at peace. I have the unique since of something quite special, just beneath the surface, taking place over the next days up here, next door to the ends of the earth. I am grateful for having had this day to live. I am grateful for the privilege to be in this place. The Mundurucu's are a people God has placed in my life in a beautiful way. I look forward to living among them these days. Thank You Lord for it all...

From the Helm – Friday, July 11, 2008

We arrived at dusk in Mamia last night. We were greeted warmly onshore by the community. I was also able to try out our new gangplank for the first time. It felt like walking off one of the cruise ships! It works perfectly.

We gathered everyone and met in the pavilion for a service at 7:30 PM. Lots of familiar faces here. The reunion was sweet among team and village. There is one young boy that befriended the team last year that is back, in style, this year. His nickname is "too ornery". This little guy is unreal. Lovable enough to conquer your heart and manipulating enough to rule the world someday. At lunch, he swam around with the girls and guys out at anchor having the best of times. The only difference between him and them was the fact he was butt naked! Anyway, his one to watch as the days go by. He's got some kinda future for sure...

- All teams on location by about 8:15 AM, going about their business. All were able to put in a good morning of work. The crowds were moderate and steady in all areas of ministry.

About 9 O'clock, Abraham tracked me down with word that the Chief of Terra Preta (Black Earth) wanted to see me. This is a Chief and village that has refused outsiders for as long as anyone can remember. It is the final outpost of the Mundurucu on the Mamia River.

So, I grabbed Bill, Phillip and Doc Sandy up and we took off for parts unknown. The ride aboard the AMOR/T&T was nothing less than I had imagined. The channel narrowed and the overhang tightened. The water ahead of us had scarcely a ripple. The reflection of the banks was like a mirror.

We finally arrive after 30 minutes. There were 79 steps up the hill to the top where the village sits. When we got up there, the view was silencing. I'm not real good at describing things so I won't try. Leaving as enough said, we were all awed...

Cacique Joao is a large man. He is known to his peers as “Worrier”. When he greeted us though, we found a gracious, hospitable man. He led us around the village, pointing out the various houses and trees. There were children everywhere – all his grandchildren. All nine families here are his offspring. All the children are his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. What a paradise for *any* man to imagine.

After an hour or so, he invited us in to sit down for awhile. The ladies had prepared sweet coffee and tapioca cakes. As we chatted the kids were out gathering Inga for us to take home. They even cut a pineapple for us to take along. We brought nothing in the way of gifts for these folks. All we could do was graciously receive.

By the time we departed, we had made a new friend. God had opened the doors to a whole new world. What a way to live – watching as God opens doors that man has had locked tight for decades. What a way to live, indeed...

The Beatriz can make it up to Terra Preta, slowly and carefully, during the months of April, May and June when the waterfalls are well submerged. So, I guess that means the Beatriz *will* make it up there someday as the Lord leads and provides.

- Things slowed to a crawl by mid-afternoon in Mamia. We packed up and bagged out by 3 PM. At four, 6 adults who are the fruits of Abrahams visits here were baptized in the river. These people were so excited. Their desire was to publicly display their profession of faith in the Lord. It was special for all of us. These people up here are isolated. Abraham’s visits are few and far between. However, they have all they need – a Bible; their relationship to their Creator; and each other. Can’t think of anything I could add to that scenario...

We set sail downstream at 6 PM. The stars are beginning to show there majesty as we cruise. The bow is packed. It never takes long for our folks to figure out that the best seat in the house is usually from the helm.

All is good, all are well. The sat phone is down. Communication with the outside world is on a “need to only” basis. Right now, I’m ready to lay my head down and surrender to rest. I’m grateful for the day – Grateful indeed.

From the Helm – Saturday, July 12, 2008

We arrived and anchored at 1:30 this morning of the coast of Aru. Just before arrival, our commander checked of the starboard side and say that the AMOR/Betty was listing heavily. Well, the “all hands on deck” alarm was sounded and emergency bilge pumps were removed from the Beatriz and taken over to the Betty. The water had already reached mid-engine. Within 15 minutes all was high and dry. The source of the problem was that water began to enter through her exhaust pipe while towing her just “a little bit to fast”. The rest is history...

Abraham was in a deep sleep when my crew flew in through the windows of his vessel. He yelled from his hammock for everybody to “either quiet down or get out! He was a working man and needed his rest!!” I imagine he was having one of those “father of too many dating age daughters” nightmares... Bless is heart...

I'm grateful the Beatriz is equipped the way she is. Our emergency pumps could drain a lake in minutes. A comfort to one who spends 6 months out of the year on the water. A comfort indeed.

All teams were ashore and working by 8 this morning. A few of the team went peacock bass fishing at dawn bringing in a couple of nice ones. Good way for them to start their day.

1:30 PM - We began re-drilling the well here – attempt #3. All has gone smoothly thus far. This morning, we also had some Acai collected and have been watching the entire process of turning it to the sought-after nectar. What a deal. Going to enjoy some of it as soon as it chills.

- This afternoon the Cacique and several of the church leaders asked to meet with me. They expressed the desire to have a church building here in Aru. There are now about a dozen who gather regularly to study their Bibles and fellowship. This is the second time they've asked for such help. I will only promise what I have in my own pocket. I'm a sucker for believing folks will do what they say they'll do and have made many commitments based on the goodwill of others and then been left holding the deal in the end – imagine that... So, I told these guys they will probably have to take it slowly and build a building themselves, over time. I'll help with what I can, when I can. They understood.

9:00 PM – Onboard at last... An eventful afternoon for us. Medical wrapped up a little early, having seen everyone there was to see, at least once. VBS had a great time with the children. The spirit of this community is gentle and kind. Easy to love.

Dental had a few extra folks show up late and worked on though the service this evening. The well is at a standstill. We are 75 feet down right now and our bit is bound. It has bound several times but we've been able to loose it. This time it doesn't look so good. I had them shut down for the night and let is sit. I was afraid we'd burn the engine or clutch up and still lose the well. So, we'll see what happens in the morning. For now, snacking on a few “pigs-in-a-blanket” and bed sounds like a good ending the day to me...

From the Helm – Sunday, July 13, 2008

Good night of sleep for everyone last night. The morning started early with the examination of our well. Unfortunately, it is a total loss. All said and done, Aru now has a 75 foot hole with 17 links of drill pipe and a good looking bit, neatly tucked away at the bottom. Few communities can boast of such an adornment... I guess we are out of the

well drilling business for the rest of the year unless funds appear from somewhere. In God's big picture, I'm sure we will drill again when He is ready for us to.

We left shore for Kwata at 10 AM after medical saw 28 patients that came in three canoes from St. Antonio. I'm glad we stayed the night. These people had several pressing needs.

We arrived in Kwata just before noon. Bill and I went ashore to pay our respects to Mama Ester and Grand Chief Manuel. The reunion was sweet, as it has always been. As we approached the beach, it was somewhat surreal. We were pulling up to the very spot where the beheading of the "enemies of the people" used to take place a few short decades ago in the '50's. This ritual was to both appease the gods and reassure the villagers that they were safe from harm. Wow, I can't image the scenes the elders of the Mundurucu's have witnessed. These are the same elders that are coming to know of Christ today and are so peaceful and hospitable. My God is truly an awesome God indeed.

The afternoon was a hot one. All teams worked hard. There was scarcely a breeze and not a cloud in the sky. So important to keep hydrated. All are well.

Construction is building two new ramps for Mama Ester at her home. The old steps are becoming a challenge for this little lady. She'll be 89 years old (this is everyone's collective guess) in just a few more weeks... Quite a Lady indeed.

All seem excited as we take in what God has for us to see as we move along in the days He has provided. Our team has a calm demeanor. God has blessed us with unity and patience. I love to see it happen this way.

From the Helm – Monday, July 14, 2008

1:00 PM – the first half of our second day in Kwata has been busy, as expected. Right now, a bunch of folks are cooling off in the river after lunch. The heat has been more forgiving this morning. A nice breeze has been steady out of the east.

After things got going onshore this morning, Abraham and I took off for Paraua just to be sure they were aware of our arrival tomorrow morning. I went straight to visit Gabi and didn't leave her side till we again shoved off for Kwata.

Gabi is a precious child that a number of groups have fallen in love with. She has some form of degenerate muscular disease that has kept her chair or bed bound all of her life yet her spirit has remained sweet. She just turned eleven. Her body is beginning to change, creating all manner of confusion and frustration for her. Today, she told me she had no purpose in life. That her life was futile and she just wanted it to end some time soon.

My heart wept. My eyes wept as well for that matter. I realized that a pep talk would do little for her today. I realized most in her situation probably feel the same – I know I would. I was humbled. We were both silent for a very long moment. In the silence, I began recalling the impact she has had on me personally. How she brightens up when she sees me. How she fusses over a new doll. How she stokes my hair, as best she can, as I carry her around to VBS, clinic, etc. She keeps me right-sized. Her acceptance of her lot has inspired me. Her presence reminds me of how little *I* am required to accept in my life on a regular basis – very little I have occasion to fret over. She has reminded me to express my gratitude to God for the many simple things in my life such as take an unlabored breath; hold my head up for more than a minute at a time; bathe myself; choose *not* to run and play; choose to leave or enter a room at will; choose who I will sit and fellowship with.

Then, I then told her how special she was to me. How God having brought her into the world has made a better one of mine. How she has made a difference to me just because she *is*. I told her it was ok to get down at times. Get angry at times. To cry when she felt like it. I told her all these things are just fine as long as she keeps telling God about her day. Talk to him about it all. Ask Him to rest her mind.

Then, I held her there in the chair and looked out at the river for another very long moment. I thank You, God, for Gabi. I ask that You touch her heart in the ways only You know will comfort her. Thank You for her life. She is a precious baby to me, indeed...

5:25 PM – The work day is over – very busy for all teams. Mama Ester's house now has a ramp at her front door and a covered patio out the back so she can hang a hammock in the mornings. She is quite pleased.

Medical split into mobile and fixed. Mark and Phillip have been out all day doing house calls on those that were homebound. They have treated everything from snakebites to machete wounds. They are still on the water somewhere. Should be back by dark-thirty...

I've been in meetings most of the day. It seems what I do most of here in Kwata. It's the part of my days that reminds me, vividly, of my limitations. The requests are endless from the health agents, chiefs and churches. I just do what I can do and ask them to do what they can do as well. No promises are made. No offence taken. It is what it is.

One of the requests I *was* able to accommodate was the painting and repairs to their church building. It's a small amount that is needed. It will be done.

All in all, a good day. I'm quite grateful to have been included in it all. Sleep should come easy tonight as we cruise to Paraua. Rest will be welcomed by all aboard...

From the Helm – Wednesday, July 16, 2008

Smooth night of cruising. It's 7 AM and we are almost through the Parana da Eva. ETA for Manaus is set for 2 PM.

The team is sleeping in today, for the most part. There's not a cloud in the sky. The breeze is cool off the bow.

We're homeward bound and all is well. What a deal it's all been. How grateful I am to have lived these days, to see them unfold. I thank You Lord for allowing me to be here at all. My, my, my...

From The Helm – Tuesday, July 15, 2008

2:30 PM – The gang is out on a jungle walk. Our last day on location is complete. Within a couple of hours, after a swim to cool off, we should be underway to Manaus.

Today was a pleasant way to end things up. Paraua is a small community. Chief Pedro is a fine young man. I bought 1,000 pounds of Acai from him to help Abraham along the way. Maybe the two of them can work out some good commerce together. The Indians are weary of outsiders taking advantage of them. It is the reason that access is so restricted. I paid double the price for the fruit so there would be no question as to the motivation.

- The neatest thing about the day for me was Gabi getting her new wheelchair that Jeff brought, as well as a new ramp up to her house. It all worked perfectly! All Gabi wanted the rest of the day was be pushed around – and that we did. She smiled more this morning than I've seen her smile in a good long time. Thank you Jeff and thank You Lord for working together to make this child's life a little bit brighter. It sure did work.

6:30 PM – Underway at last, we are about to release the *AMOR/Betty* and Abraham from our tow and head up the Araria toward the Madeira.

He and his family came up for a time of sharing with the group. I asked him to share what was on his heart, without reservation. The group became aware of his difficulties and challenges. Most are financial, relating to fuel to carry out what he feels he should be doing and vessel repairs for the *AMOR/Betty*. At this point, we're just keeping our pastor's boats afloat. There is no money for much needed hull, engine and superstructure repairs.

I marvel sometimes at this whole paradox. Regardless of economic conditions, our churches back home continue to build and invest unbelievable amounts of resources to make things “nicer” for themselves. Then, after experiencing the life of one of these pastors in the Valley, 10 thousand dollars within a multi-million dollar budget to support the ministers they've come to love is just impossible to find. Individuals have been more than generous as God has touched their hearts. The collective church attitude towards missions is the deal here. I can't dwell on these matters for very long. It's not a healthy thought pattern for me to ponder – truly baffling...

God continues to be faithful though. Lives continue to be changed. Churches back home continue to be blessed in their efforts. I'm grateful for those who come and open doors here in the Valley. It's all good. I rest in the knowledge that things are just the way they're supposed to be today.

I'm grateful for all You've shown me this day. I am grateful for Your love, care and provision. I am grateful Your plan involves me in some small way. I have peace in my soul. Your grace is sufficient for me. What a deal...