

“From The Helm”

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Arkadelphia

Saturday, July 14, 2007

Arkadelphia has arrived and we are underway! At midnight last night, the boys and I went to the airport to meet the group. Usually, we wait for a couple of hours before the teams start to emerge from Customs. This morning, they started coming through the doors at 12:45 AM! Customs only x-rayed a few of our bags – didn’t open any. God is good...

Having Jimmy, Jeff, Bill and Randy aboard is like stepping back in time. Today has been a day of remembering for me. AMOR had its beginnings in Arkadelphia more than two decades ago. We all met on an AMAR (Amazon/Arkansas Partnership Missions) trip to the Santarem area of Para. The vision and focus that became so clear back then, is still very much alive today – to share the Gospel with the secluded and difficult to reach of the Valley. What a ride it has been...

By 10 this morning, we arrived at a friend of ours (Wellington) house to find that one of his farm hands had died just a few hours ago. I just saw the young man a couple of days coming back to Manaus with the Orlando group. His fever was spiking and he was on his way to Manaus to get checked out. Well, he got back here to the Parana da Eva last night, lay down and simply died. He was 37 and has left 6 girls between the ages of 3 and 12 behind – what a deal. I won’t even try for the “why” in this one. We will just help the family as we see we need to.

Cida stayed back in Manaus to purchase anesthetic for our dental team and see off the Orlando team. She will join us when she gets it all done in a day or two. I miss her onboard. Our boys have a couple of friends and cousins down for the trip. It is just like home indeed...

It’s 2:30 in the afternoon and we just turned to head South on the Madeira River. The wind is high and the river is sassy – good sailing anyway though. Everyone have all been lounging around, visiting, eating and resting. Our ETA to rendezvous with Pastor Abraao in the Mundurucu Nation is set for the wee hours of the morning, tomorrow.

I look forward to what God has waiting for us there. It has always been good. I have no reason to doubt it will change. It will be what it is and we will all experience it together as a family of 46, team and staff...

Sunday, June 15, 2007

The day started early. I was headed to Nova Olinda by 3:45 to pick up the anesthetic Cida sent from Manaus. It was a dark, cold run! I was back by 5:45 as the sun was rising. Very pretty sight.

We arrived in Foz do Canuma late last night, under rain. The tarps remained down until morning with the A/C running for the team. It was a comfortable night of sleep.

Pastor Abraao came aboard with his family in tow at 7 this morning. He has a new destination for us – Aldeia Mamai. We will be the first outside group to visit this people. These are a quiet, reserved community and live a LONG way from where we started out this morning!

We traveled all day long after breakfast. We left the Canuma River and headed up the Mapia at traveled it's winding, narrow channel for 7 hours. This place is kinda like Mt. Home, AR. You have to know where it is and want to go there or else, you won't go at all! No easy, direct route. What a beautiful cruise. The banks were are high and lush with virgin forest – what a sight.

As soon as the Beatriz got moored we went ashore to meet the chief and other leadership. I was impressed by the sweet, humble nature of these men. We were welcomed graciously. Even invited us to watch Brasil play soccer against Argentina with them on TV – this we did!

After the game and waiting out a good little storm, we had dinner and went ashore for a worship service. The service was beautiful. It was short but very well attended. Abraao has only been here twice before. During these brief visits, 7 have accepted Christ as their savior and the children have learned to sing a number of songs. It was a great thing to see! We were all taken aback by the receptivity of this isolated people – We all look forward to the morning. We look forward to ministering through the gifts and talents God has blessed us with. We are grateful to be part of it all.

Monday, July 16, 2007

The day started by 7:15 for our team. We had expected large crowds. It ended up being only a few for dental and a steady trickle for medical – I know better than to “expect” anything at all. Just got ahead of myself...

It was a great day. VBS was exciting. The children of Mamia are electric with energy and eager to learn. It was so refreshing to see how they interacted with the team. One little guy hung around the clinic, dental and me all day long. Every time one of us would open a bottle of mineral water, he would ask us for the bottle when we got done. By days' end, this enterprising young guy had at least 100 empty bottles lining the wall of his hut! Really cool kid. He has the "empty bottle" market tied up on the Mapia River.

Our construction team put a new wall on the front of the run down Catholic Church. It is in keeping with our purpose – we are here to serve and share, regardless of denominational affiliation. It was a no-brainer. The people here know we are evangelical Christians. We preach and teach that Christ is solely sufficient. They will listen to our message because we have not made distinctions among men – that is the way we are; that is the way we will continue to be. Where others have been asked to leave restricted areas, we continue on.

At this evening's service, many of the children came wearing the new little dresses and t-shirts the group gave to them. They all looked great! We got lots of pictures. The house was packed for the service. Lee preached from John 3:16. When the invitation was given, 12 young people and adults came forward making public professions of faith. It was moving. One of the men that came forward had spent some time talking to me earlier in the day about hunting, survival and life in general. After the service, he told me that he trusted Christ as his savior because he trusted us, the ones who had brought the simple message – truly humbling...

During the course of the day, I had to send to the city of Borba for another water pump. My crew managed to burn three pumps over the last 36 hours! What a "thrill" it all can be some times. Just little tests to reassure me that I am most definitely not in control of everything and that my reaction to such situations should reflect acceptance instead of frustration – boy, that's easier said than done! I'm getting better in my old age though.

In the late afternoon, a nurse and young dentist showed up from the Department of Indian Affairs. They didn't know we were here. We made the decision we would move on tonight – no need to double up when there are other communities that have no help at all. I'm glad they come out from time to time. It lets us move on to new waters.

After church, we headed down river. The cruise is refreshing. The scenery is beautiful, even by the starlight. ETA is set for Aru at 5:00 AM. I look forward to a night of rest. Tomorrow will be here soon enough. All are well. All are getting along in our tight quarters. Time to let this day come to an end.

Wednesday, July 18, 2007

We awoke off the shore of Aru. The cruise down was uneventful except for lose of yet another pump motor – this time it is the sewage holding tank. Oh, well. We'll just send for another replacement in a day or so...

Shortly after dawn, we went to port and built our dock. The river level is lower this year than on past visits. I would guess that the level today is at least 2 feet lower than this time last year. One thing remains the same though, the sticky clay! Aru is built atop a huge hill of potter's clay. A challenge indeed for keeping our vessels clean.

All teams were set up and working on location by around 9 this morning. By the time we had picked a location, set up the tower and equipment and cranked the motors, it was 11 o'clock when we started drilling on the well. I have wanted to drill water wells in the Nation for some time now. The drawback has been that the Grand Chief, Manuel, has wanted all benefits to go to his own village (Kuata). I have refuse by simple inaction up to this point. This year, I decided to just do as God leads and forget the "politics" of the Nation. It's the right thing to do. It is the way it will be.

Dental filled and extracted many teeth. I even got in on the fun for a few minutes. Bill Dixon held the light for me. Bill didn't think he would even want to be close to the blood, etc. Here he was, literally with blood on his hands! Pretty neat. Miranda and Jimmy had a steady stream of patients all the way up to the end. As the men drilled deeper and deeper on the well, the color of the material pumped up varied from light brown to an almost crimson red. By day's end, we had gone down about 60 feet – a good beginning. A good day's work.

By days' end, all teams had had full days. I had a chance to visit with friends from here and to check up on how the new church is doing. There are 16 baptized believers here where, 3 years ago, there were none. God has established a church in this place. Maybe some day we might help them build a building of some kind. It was great to hear them sing, read scripture and do skits in this evening's service. It was a good service indeed.

It has been a long day. We are all tired. I don't think anyone will have trouble sleeping tonight. There is some of our team out gator hunting right now. I don't think I'll wait up to hear of their success or failure though. I know that I, for one, will enjoy lying down in just a few minutes – it will feel good.

Wednesday, July 18, 2007

Well, the date on yesterday's log was today's date as well! We didn't really skip Tuesday. I just called it Wednesday! Out here, time doesn't really much matter. The days seem to blend into each other quite nicely. So, for any of you that may be "control freaks", Sorry about that!

Today at Aru was very active for all teams. VBS was busy as usual. Dental set the day aside primarily for fillings. Medical was steady all morning and did some house calls in the afternoon. The well diggers worked ALL day drilling.

The well became a challenge. We kept hitting a material that was so dense and milky that every time we stopped to add another link to go deeper, the bit would bind. After several hours of trying and actually pulling out and re-inserting 65 feet of links, we finally declared the well "dug"!

A funny thing happened this morning. I was at the well site when the local captain came and said that the chief and health agent from Mamia needed to speak with me "urgently" on the radio. My natural thought process led me to imagine everything from the death of a patient to the need for a medivac. When I got to the radio, the "urgent" request was for some fishing line and hooks that Gary was handing out! I assured them that we would get this emergency equipment to them ASAP...

The service this evening was good. After a full day of squatting around the well, I was kinda stiff and sore. I was pretty much in slow-motion. Lee preached on Revelation 3:20ff. The people were very attentive – good crowd. At the end when we were saying our good-byes, we had a church discussion about studying the Word and encouraging each other.

This young church is at the point where they want constant help from a pastor. We encouraged them to realize that God has probably already called one of them to lead their group. This person just needs to answer the call. Abraao can only get up here one every month or 6 weeks. In between times, they can continue to study scripture and grow. I also invited them to join us for the RBBI in October – I believe they will send at least one of their numbers.

It is 11 PM and the morning will soon be here. The gator hunters are out again tonight. I will, as usual, leave it with them and seek out my hammock. It has been a full day indeed. Tomorrow, Kuata awaits us...

Thursday, July 19, 2007

The night was restful. This morning early, Randy and I went up to pay our respects to Chief Manuel and Mama Ester. It was good to see them both. Mama is still precious. Manuel is still Manuel.

Kuata is a big place. Many house; many people. The morning was a steady stream of medical, dental and VBS activity – lots of children!

This afternoon, several of us went visiting to the chief's house. It was a rare occasion to find him not only home but talkative as well. Bill Dixon was able to ask many questions about the history and culture. Manuel and Mama Ester had done this with me and Rickey several years ago. It was good to hear it again. This is a tribe with a violent history. In the past, they aggressively protected their land and population. Today, all they have is the memory of nobler days.

We all worked hard all day. Construction put siding on an exterior wall of a hut this afternoon. Medical treated everything from worms to snakebites. The portable dental unit David donated in June has been a beautiful blessing indeed. Many, many fillings have been done. Thank you, my friend, for such a profound contribution to the health of our people here in the Amazon.

I spoke with Cida again today. She was finally able to get Robert's dental suitcase liberated by the Federal Police this afternoon! Six days and 1,200 dollars later, the bag should be on its way back to Dallas – wow, what a thing... Miranda and I were chatting a bit yesterday about AMOR having enough instruments on hand to keep at least 3 dentists working so that they need not bring anything from home. I believe God is going to provide in this way...

The house was packed for the service this evening. Many, many children in the crowd. Mama Ester gave her testimony. She was hard to follow. At 88 years of age she is sharp as a tack but her mind seems to fly along much quicker than she speaks! So, what we all understood of it, was a blessing indeed!!

We had a nice surprise Birthday Party for Bill Dixon this evening! It was fun and I believe he really didn't expect it. The cake and fellowship was good and fun. Bill is 70 years old, today – how time has slipped away on me...

The gator hunters were successful in bringing in a 4 footer tonight after church. I'm sure they had a good time. I'm just tired...

Friday, July 20, 2007

It is 3:50 in the afternoon and we have just anchored under a mild storm offshore of Paraua. This is our final destination for ministry this trip. We will try to have a worship service here this evening, then rest up for our last day of work tomorrow.

Today has been good. Much happened to make for a very full, half-day in Kuata. Dental seemed to have pull as many teeth this morning as they pulled all day yesterday. All of our medical stations worked diligently up til the last moment. VBS had bunches of children and adults. At 1:00, Lee baptized three young ladies on the same beach where, 40 short years ago, these Indians practices trophy head-hunting – What a deal... A good day indeed.

At about 9:30 this morning, Chief Manuel came and asked that I meet with him and his tribal counsel. I agreed to the meeting that ultimately lasted for about 2 hours. It was a time of thanks, reporting and planning. In the end, he asked if we would consider entering into the “upper waters” of the Mundurucu Nation. This is a place where he has not permitted anyone to visit or minister for many years. It is very distant and remote – the people have many needs.

I agreed to bring selected groups there over the next year or two, if the Lord didn't have other plans for us all. This is an example of what living the Word we preach will lead to. God has re-opened long closed doors to this Nation. He has specific plans for His children here. I am just pleased He has included me in a small way... Mama Ester sat quietly through the meeting (the only woman present). At the end, she simply said a whispered “amen”.

Our team is all well of body and spirit. We are all tired yet eager for the next thing God has for us. God has blessed us with His protection, peace and grace. He is faithful...

Saturday, July 21, 2007

We didn't have services onshore last night. We were all tired and Paraua seemed to settle down early as well. At 6 this morning, Abraao and I went ashore and met up with Chief Pedro. It was good to see him again. Very nice young man. He is one of the youngest acting chiefs of the Nation – around 30 years old.

While the teams were setting up, Jeff and I went to see Gabi. She is a 9 year-old little girl that I fell in love with 3 years ago. She has cerebral palsy and wont get much batter as time goes on. I forgot to bring her a present this time but Lucas volunteered to give her a little stuffed animal – she loved it! She is very affectionate – loves to lay her head on my arm. Humbling for me, indeed...

The day went well and was over by 1:00 PM. We cruised down to Foz do Canuma where we said good-bye to Abraao and his family. Jeff, Jimmy and I went up to see the house we've built for them (Hardin Baptist Church provided the original funds). They are remodeling the place by adding a kitchen and bathroom. It should be ready in a couple of weeks. I got a list of furnishings they will need (stove, refrigerator, dinette set, etc.) – they don't know it yet but, we'll just take care of this "wish list" for them. It will be a nice surprise.

It is 5:45 PM and the sun is setting beautifully over the Madeira River. We've been underway toward Manaus for an hour now. ETA is set for mid-afternoon tomorrow, Sunday the 22nd.

It has been a good run in the Mundurucu Indian Nation. Many old relationships were reaffirmed and many new ones were initiated. The people of the Nation have received true Christian love through the touch of our teams' hands. We have felt love in return through smiles and hugs. Eighteen adults made public professions of faith – 3 were baptized. How neat.

Over the past 40 years, I have seen organizations and denominations come and go to this great Valley. I have witnessed the unveiling of false profits by inconsistencies in words and actions. I have witnessed those who simply share the Word, able to persevere and remain to work. I have seen with my own eyes and felt in my soul the awesome workings of the Holy Spirit where no man has been able to penetrate.

Speaking only for myself, I have chosen to live for Him in this day he created for me. As long as I follow instead of lead, I have every reason to believe He will be with me and show me the next step along the way. Maybe He will allow me to continue as one of the "remaining" ones – maybe He won't. However, If I take it one day at a time, I really don't have to wonder if I am far from His will or not. When I walk in my own will, it simply doesn't work. That's just the way it is. I'm glad He keeps it simple for me...

It has been a joy to have Arkadelphia with us again after so many years. After these days together, it seems we just picked up where we left off. Thank You Lord for these simple pleasures. Thank You for timeless friendships. Thank You for letting me be a little spot in it all. Thanks...

From the Helm will continue on or about the 31st of July, 2007. Thank you for your continued prayers and support. Come and join us in the Valley, if God so leads.