

“From The Helm”

Boyd Walker

Orlando FBC

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Tuesday, July 03, 2007

The Orlando team arrived right at 1:00 AM. After a couple of flat tires on the way to Miami and a late departure, everyone was through Immigration, Customs and headed to the Beatriz by 3:00 this morning.

It was like a home coming for me! Most of the team are veterans of several trips. Many dear friends onboard this week. It was particularly good to see Cida come through the gates! She has not been to the Amazon or the Beatriz since 1994. We are all looking forward to the days ahead. William, Phillip, Matthew, Cida and I have never been on the same boat at the same time before – what a special deal this is...

We sailed from Manaus at 4:15 this morning and are passing in front of Itacoatiara right now after 10 hours of cruising. The river has a good bit of boat traffic today. Literally hundreds of yachts and passenger boats are coming back from the big “Bull” party in Parintins. This is where over half-million people converge each year to party for the weekend. It is a decadent celebration and the music and dances have much to do with the spirit world. The story about the Bull Festival is a subject for a whole other writing! Right now, it is just great to be headed to the Satere-Maue Nation.

- At nine this evening we rendezvoused with Pastor Edno at the mouth of the Araria River at dusk to meet briefly about his work on the Rio Lago Preto and to drop him off a battery, life jackets and other equipment for his vessel, the AMOR/Teresa. It was good to see him again!

We are now anchored above the city of Maues. My crew is tired. Vila Esperanca is only a couple of hours away. We will sleep here tonight and move on to Esperanca and Vila Mikilis at dawn. It has been a good day of travel. It has been a good day of life.

Wednesday, July 4, 2007

We anchored for a few hours just beyond the city of Maues. My men needed a little rest before beginning another long day. We arrived off the coast of Mikilis and Esperanca at nine this morning.

Jim N., Jim H., Doug and I went over to see what our water project was going to involve. Well, communication is a bit slow around here. By the time translation goes from English to Portuguese to Satere and back again, none of us really has a clue as to what is going on! After about an hour though, we had it figured out enough that we will actually get to lay some pipe this afternoon!

After a quick lunch, we went to visit and pay our respects to Tuisa Everisto over in Esperanca. He cried as he hugged us. I've missed this old man. His health has gone down considerably since his stroke several years ago. One day, I will show up to find he isn't around anymore. But, you know? One day just as soon or sooner, I might not be around anymore either! So, I guess neither of us has a jump on the other. We'd both better just enjoy the day God has given us this day...

It was 3 PM before all teams were working at full steam. The hill we climb is very steep and high. Getting our work stations set up was a little more strenuous than usual. My crew dug some forty steps into the clay to make the climb easier for the team – better indeed.

After dinner we went back up to land for a worship service. The house was full. Pastor Moises preached and several others spoke as well, including me. By the time all was said and done, we had had 2 hours of singing, speaking and singing again! It was good to see old friend. Many, many children. I am grateful we have a strong VBS team – reaching these children is such a good deal. God has been gracious to provide us with the opportunity to minister to such little ones. Children take special hold on my heart – God takes special care of them...

The day has been good. The night is comfortable for sleeping. The dawn will be here soon. Thank you Lord for this day and the place in it you've given to me.

Thursday, July 5, 2007

Today was hot all day. The climb to Esperanca seemed a bit steeper! It was all good though.

During the morning hours, all teams were running steadily and smoothly. Over in Ilha Mikilis, we found that some of the existing pipe we were going to tie into was of an odd, antiquated size. So, one of our smaller vessels was sent to Maues in search of fittings. By noon, all the new and odd-size was being slipped together.

Back at Esperanca, the crowds were larger and the lines more continuous. Richard and Winston worked on adding several houses to the water system we put in here several years ago. VBS had more children than ever. Dental became a key attraction as well.

A beautiful thing happened at lunch time today. The construction crew came back with the news that the Tuchaua of Ilha Mikilis had asked us to have a service there tonight. This is the first such invitation anywhere in the Nation, at anytime. So, we promptly accepted.

As we finished out our day of work, I became more and more excited about the service over at Mikilis. Jim and I reflected much on our history here and how things have developed and evolved over the last 8 years. Tonight was special indeed.

The Beatriz was unable to reach the shore. The Mikilis port is far too shallow for our 8 ft. draft. The secondary vessels shuttled everyone in.

- What a fabulous night this has been. The people of Mikilis sang and sang to us. They gave thanks to God for sending the Gospel to them though the group. They were simply grateful. All of us were moved. This is what it is all about. Thank you Lord for letting me be here. Thank You for allowing me to be a small part of this day You've created and these people You've place in my path. Wow - thank you for including me at all...

The day is done. We sail for Villa Nova at dawn tomorrow. All are well aboard our ship. The team is unified and healthy

Friday, July 6, 2007

We were underway before dawn on the short cruise to Vila Nova, the Capital city of the Satere Nation. The service last night is still on my mind. It was truly a confirmation that the Holy Spirit is moving mightily among the Satere-Maue. It is exciting and comforting to see firsthand.

Vila Nova has always been one of the “obligatory” stops for our teams. It is a political necessity but, I must confess, it is not on my list of favorite places to spend my summer vacation... This visit seemed to be different in a couple of ways though.

The first time we came here to work, to my knowledge, there were no Christians among the people. Now, there are at least two evangelical churches with a good number of professing believers. Doors that were closed to all 8 years ago now are opening to the Gospel. Our history in the Nation is rich with friendship and mutual respect. It wasn't always that way... Thank You Lord for using us to prop open the doors for all who have followed in our wake over the years.

The day was extremely hot and still. Construction took the day off from their activities. We didn't have a project planned for Vila Nova. Medical was able to see all who needed attention by mid-afternoon. Robert and his crew in dental were buried in extractions until they simply had to stop. VBS is always strong here - Lots of fun with the children.

We held a service at the close of the work day. The local leadership all had a word of gratitude and request. The house was packed. The message by Pastor Moises was tremendous even though I understood little of what he said in Sateré. I just know it sounded good...

After dinner back on the Beatriz, the men all sat around and chatted with Jim Hardman a bit. He is supposed to get married onboard tomorrow. It was one of those “circles of advice”. There we were, a bunch of men with at least 20 years of marriage experience each, giving advice on a subject we still haven't figured out ourselves, to a man that has no clue what he's getting into. By the end of it, after looking back on my own experiences, I was just glad I still had a wife at all! Wow, what a deal...

The day has been rich. God has provided opportunity and provision in just the right portions for us all. It was a good day to live and experience. Thank You, Lord for it all.

Saturday, July 7, 2007

The fog was heavy this morning. I had forgotten that the fog is always thick in this area. The river gets narrow and the banks are high from this point forward on the Marau River. The river runs faster and faster as we move further up. The head waters are but a day and a half's journey in the Beatriz.

As we passed Nova Aldeia, the Tuchaua signaled frantically for us to stop. We had to continue but Pastor Moises went and spoke with him. This Tuchaua, Clementino, had decided earlier in the year that he did not want a team of “white men” in his village. Now that he has seen us arrive in the Nation, he has changed his mind. The way our schedule is unfolding, we have gained a day with which we may be able to minister here – we will just have to see what happens.

It was a slow, tedious trek to our destination. The channel is so narrow, all 3 of our secondary vessels were required to clear the channel and steer the Beatriz through the tight bends. After two hours, we finally docked in Vista Alegre. The Tuchaua here is quite a man. He is wise and gentle in manner. I remember him from several years ago, somewhere here in the Nation. It was good to visit with him again.

VBS had a big day, as usual. They seem to raise excitement everywhere they appear! Construction installed several showers and faucets. Medical treated just about everyone by late afternoon. I abandoned dental once again and left Robert and his team to work without me – they don’t need me at all but I miss the fellowship!

By days end, the team was bagged out and on the boat by 5 o’clock. It was time for a special event – Jim and Ronnie’s wedding ceremony...

Sylvia and the crew worked all afternoon decorating the Beatriz with palm leaves cut from the jungle. It looked great by the time the generator went silent and the bride was escorted in by Richard – what a deal...

I was Best Man and Sylvia was Maid of Honor. Ronnie looked beautiful and Jim looked like most grooms look – lost... It was a beautiful sunset service on the stern of the Beatriz. Following the ceremony, a dinner of Shrimp Alfredo and stuffed Pirarucu with all the trimmings was served to all 40 onboard. It was a lot of fun – a wedding aboard the Beatriz...

It is 7 PM and we are anchored in the narrow channel in front of Nova Aldeia. Tomorrow will be here in a few short hours. It has been another good day. All are well. All are tired. All are blessed to be able to be here at all. I look forward to my hammock tonight...

July 8, 2007

Maybe I shouldn’t have laid down quite so early last night – I was up a 2:30 this morning! No big deal. It has been a good day just the same.

The schedule was a bit accelerated due to the fact that we needed to depart by 3 this afternoon in order to immerge from the “sticks” before dusk. Our day started at 7:30 with all teams on location. Just a short break for lunch, then back to work till 2:30.

This is a special place for me. I can't really identify why, but, since last year I have thought about Nova Aldeia and Tuchaua Clementino from time to time. While we were ministering in Nazare last year, Clementino's son came and asked us to stop by on the way out and meet with the old man. When Jim and I went up, it was just one of those places that seemed inviting to my eyes and my soul – I wanted to come back here some day.

I was disappointed when I learned he had initially rejected the idea of our visit this year but was thrilled with his change of heart. God has been at work in this community for some time now. We were just able to get a glimpse of what He may have for these precious people if they will only listen and hear as the Word is expressed. These are a humble group of people. Less demanding, less arrogant than many. It has been a joy to serve them this day.

After a brief thanks giving service and distribution of some clothing, we were underway to Belo Horizonte. Our cruise downriver through the narrow channels was a bit less eventful than the trip up. Only one tree came crashing through the kitchen this time... It is a beautiful, slow cruise through a waterway that is uncharted and has been seen by only scarce few strangers over the centuries. I recognize and am grateful for the privilege to be here...

It's 8 PM. We are anchored for the night. A couple of tables playing cards and several folks down for the night. All are in seemingly good health. Spirits and attitudes are united and sweet. We look forward to what the morning will bring. Thank You Lord for it all.

Monday, July 9, 2007

The day started early. The village of Belo Horizonte is quite small – total of 13 families of which 6 have gone to town! This is another more primitive situation. The chief was at first reluctant regarding photographs, etc. In the end, everyone got acquainted and comfortable with one another.

Jim and I took Cida and Filipino to Maues this morning after getting the teams going on location.

We have “zero” turnaround time between the Orlando and Arkadelphia groups. Arkadelphia arrives 10 hours before Orlando leaves! Just one of those things. Just the way it was supposed to be this time. So, Cida and Filipino flew back to Manaus and are doing the buying. The AMOR/Lori has been set up as a floating warehouse with refrigeration and dry storage until the Beatriz can come alongside and restock on Friday evening.

Our work day was short. Medical, dental and VBS had seen everyone and construction built an “outhouse” for the chief – all by Noon. So, when Jim and I returned from Maues at 12:30, all that remained was the formality of thanking the Tuchaua and handing out the cloths that were designated to the families here. The clothes ministry is real neat. All are so pleased to receive and it is so much fun to give. I thank Orlando for being so generous...

We were underway and started through the “major sticks” at the mouth of the Urupadi River at 2:30 PM. The trek was quite slow. My commander has never been to this area before. So, he is a bit overcautious. No problem. We’ve got all day to get through this day – no need to rush.

At 7:45 this evening, we anchored off of Santa Maria. It has been a relaxing cruise up the Urupadi. Santa Maria awaits us in the morning. It is to be our last day on location before beginning our journey homeward. Several of the team have had a little head and chest cold going on. I had it a few weeks ago – just feel miserable for 24 hours, and then everything gets better. I believe it is the high humidity, pollen, heat, etc. and the fact that everyone is tired. Spirits are high, none the less. A good night’s sleep will do wonders for us all!

Wednesday, July 11, 2007

Yesterday was a unique day in Santa Maria. When we first arrived at this tribal clan some 7 years ago, there were no professing Christians at all. The reception to our presence was tremendous – lasting relationships were built between us and the people, particularly among the leadership.

Today, there is a strong nucleus of young Christians. A church is in place. Resistance has been subtly introduced under the influence of the “pageia” (witch doctor) and her allies.

We worked hard all day and when it came time for our evening service, the Captain of the Aldeia came and asked that we not hold services because it would interfere with a tribal council meeting. So, Jim, Moises, Jana, Robert and I went to Noel’s (local lay-pastor) house and shared with each other encouraging words before we departed.

My take on this is that the Gospel has been planted and taken root. If there were not resistance, the seed planted years ago would probably have been proven sewn among the thorns. The seed, however, was clearly sewn on fertile soil! To God be the glory...

We look forward to being a part of this dynamic church in the future – watch it develop and grow in God’s way and timing. How encouraged I am to see the first fruits of a long effort among the Satere people. Over the years, I have seen missionaries and denominations come and go, actually expelled from this Nation. I have seen what were obviously efforts of the flesh simply melt away. Today, I see what God has done in His sovereignty. How refreshing. How encouraging. How awesome. How humbling...

We slept at the upper end of the “major sticks” last night after traveling about 4 hours downstream. We are now underway homeward. We plan to stop later this morning in the Port of Maues so the group can see a little civilization after days in a bush country.

Our team is tired. We are settling in for the restful cruise to Manaus. Our ETA is set for the wee hours of the morning, Friday the 13th. What a grand adventure God has blessed us with. We will glean much as the days and weeks go by. God will feed us as we are open to His nourishment. Lord, thank You for allowing me to be a quiet observer of the magnitude of Your love and grace. Thank You...