

# **“From The Helm”**

## **Boyd Walker**

### **Springfield, MO**

*Tuesday, July 31, 2007*

The team arrived 20 minutes ahead of schedule yesterday afternoon. I guess the plane made better time because it wasn't carrying 8 of our bags in the cargo bay! Customs checked only a few of the bags and cleared them all. This time they even let our glasses slide. It is all good...

The first ones through the doors were Aunt Bootsie, Yvonne and Jamie. The rest took a while filling out “lost bag” forms. Anderson (our driver) will stay in touch with Copa Airlines about collecting the bags and sending them on to Boa Vista do Ramos. We may actually receive them on the Beatriz before the trip is over – who knows. Uncle Lowell's clothes didn't make it. So, we all pitched in to build him a meager wardrobe. He won't be making any fashion statements this week but we will all appreciate him being clothed!

Preparations have gone smoothly for the trip. We actually had a few days to tidy things up a bit this time around. The turnaround between the last two groups was less than 24 hours. It was good to be able to breathe for a couple of days and give our staff some well deserved leave to spend with family. All equipment and staff are rested and good to go.

We were underway by 7 PM. Dinner was served and the team unpacked. By 10 o'clock, pretty much everyone was down in their hammocks. Other than several passing ships rocking our little world, sailing was moderately smooth. ETA for rendezvousing with Pastor Ronaldo is set for mid-day today. But, of course, we will get there when we get there.

This is only the second time we have visited this new area. Last year, William and Phillip (my two oldest sons) led the team in. God richly blessed for His kingdom. The last word I heard from the pastor was that all is prepared and waiting for us to arrive. I look forward to the days ahead. Our team is open to whatever God shows and wherever He leads. It is good to be back on the River.

My spirit is calm. The sun will be rising here in the Valley in an hour or so – a new adventure placed on our plate to live and experience. What a deal...

We stopped in Boa Vista do Ramos for an hour so that I could meet with Pastor Abraao, fuel his vessel (AMOR/Elvie) and get something for Uncle Lowell to wear.

We arrived at the entry point to Vila Manaus at 4 this afternoon. We had to turn around in the creek just a few hundred yards into it – just too much low overhang and floating grass (Tapagem) to cut through. So, here we sit at anchor for the night. We are on “white” water so, the mosquitoes got a bit bad. Thank god for the tarps and A/C upstairs. Everyone will sleep comfortably.

Pastor Ronaldo finally showed up around 8 this evening. We are scheduled to work in three communities in the area. First thing in the morning, I will send my crew in to see if we will be able to make it in with the AMOR/Beatriz. Just have to wait and see...

*Wednesday, August 1, 2007*

Well, usually things don't work “exactly” according to plan. But, things most definitely are what they are as they happen. After assessing both channels leading to the lakes, the Beatriz will have to remain anchored out here in the river. I called for Pastor Abraao to bring his boat down from Boa Vista do Ramos to help us shuttle the team and supplies to and from our various locations.

It took us a little over an hour to reach our first destination, Sao Raimundo. It is a large village. Much larger than I had anticipated. We got everything setup and ready to go and returned to the Beatriz for a quick lunch.

The afternoon's activities were steady. Many people – many needs. I don't think anyone kept an exact count but I know that Lowell and Jamie worked without stopping and my dental chair was full all afternoon. VBS had a great time. Bootsie and Yvonne said the crowd was good and well behaved. I'm glad God called them to deal with the kids – I'd rather pull teeth... I love the children. I'm just best with them a few at a time...

I was able to visit with Pastor Ronaldo this morning about the work in this area. I don't really think he has been doing all that he could or should be doing. It is a big area. He seems to be overwhelmed by it all. I suggested that he take a village at a time – not to be worried by the “whole”. One day, he will look around and find he has ministered to them all. Of course if he wants to be ineffective and gradually lose his sanity, he can just sit and ponder the enormity of the task. His choice.

In the past, Ronaldo has been the pastor of a local church. In that situation, he has had fixed perimeters within which to work. He has been accountable to some type of structured organization. Now, he is on his own and responsible before God alone for his actions and strategy. There is a huge difference in these two ministries. Not every pastor is called to be an evangelist. Not every evangelist is called to be a pastor. We will find out very soon which of these two Ronaldo is best equipped for. We will help him wherever he lands.

Sometimes, pastors need to realize that they just need to fish for a living and help in other capacities in the church. Not all who preach are called to do so. This becomes clear to me when I see the statistics from back home. In the USA we have 95% of the world's evangelical ministers ministering to 5% of the world's population. When I do the math with my simple mind, logic shows me that maybe; just maybe, there is something wrong with the picture. Not my call to make though...

We were quit for the day at 5:30 this afternoon and a dozen or so women and children gathered for a service. There were dozens of young people and adults playing soccer within earshot – few came to hear. Sometimes I allow myself to get discouraged, even annoyed at the seeming apathy toward the gospel. Then I find peace in the fact that we are called to share with whom God places in our path, as we go. We do as God leads us to do. God does the work of the heart. I'll just let Him do His deal – I'll do mine. Never have I seen poor results when I remember my place in the whole scheme of things. Everything gets out of joint when I attempt to reverse roles.

We left Sao Raimundo at 6 this evening under darkness. The mosquitoes are terrible here. We “put-putted” in the AMOR/Betty just as fast as we could to get a breeze going.

On the way back, a few of our crew that were aboard one of our secondary vessels (the AMOR/Dan Shipley) ran across a gator and brought her in! I will credit Pricilla (my niece) with the catch beings she was the most excited about it all... It was a good photo-op for everybody. When we arrived back at the AMOR/Beatriz, the tarps were down and our quarters upstairs were cooled comfortably by the A/C – nice to be home again...

Tomorrow, we will go in early to work. See how the day proceeds. Let God show us our next step. The plan is to minister one more day in Sao Raimundo; have a service at the end of the day then move on to the next town. We have a plan. I look forward to seeing how it fit's in to God's reality. For me, it is time for bed. It has been a long, good first day on location. Thank You Lord for it all...

*Thursday, August 2, 2007*

By about 11 this morning, I was the only part of the team that still had anything to do! VBS had over 70 children and medical had seen 72 patients. I had seen 11 in dental but still had 5 to go. So, I asked the 5 to meet us this afternoon at our next location, Bacabal.

It was a good morning. We all thought we would be in Sao Raimundo the entire day – It was a pleasant surprise to look up and realize we had seen all who needed help and were ready to move to new territory. The people of this region are beautiful. They seem a bit jaded by the world. This is near to the “big city” of Boa Vista. Innocence is lost early by this proximity. It’s a shame. We will just keep sharing and watch what happens.

We went back to the Beatriz for lunch. We were going to just set up the clinic at Bacabal for tomorrow and come back home. So, several of the team stayed back. As it turned out, we put in a pretty full afternoon in just a couple of hours! It was a good beginning here.

As we were working, I got a message that Pastor Edno had arrived to visit us. Fantastic!! I love this guy. He is our itinerate pastor up in the Lago Preto area. I just love him. He came when he heard we were here. We will try to visit his area on the way home in a few days – just have to see how it all works out. We have several days to go. A lot can happen in several days.

Back aboard the Beatriz at 6:45 this evening. The trip to Bacabal is only a half-hour commute. Our vessel was cooled down for us once again – how nice... Another alligator hunt is in progress at this very moment! Don’t know if they will have any luck – don’t believe I will wait up to find out either. Time to sink into the hammock and drift away. A good day indeed...

*Friday, August 3, 2007*

The day was full. All of it spent in Bacabal. The sun seemed unusually relentless. It was simply hot.

Bill and Diane put some siding on the house of a new Christian family. Come to find out, this family has given a piece of land for us to build a gathering place for the new church here some day. Of all the villages here in the area, Bacabal appears to have received the gospel with open hearts. From here, the entire region could be reached. I’d love to see that happen...

Bethany and I didn’t stop at all on the teeth deal today. It was a joy though. It seemed that each person that sat in our chair truly had a serious need for relief. It

was good to be able to help in a small way. Stacy fitted a bunch more eyeglasses. It's a neat thing to see the expressions on the faces of folks that we were able to help see a bit better.

Lowell and Jamie plugged away at medical. Along with the human patients, Jamie wanted to treat all the animals in town as well! She's fed and petted creatures this trip that only a mother could love – she likes the animals for sure...

At 4 o'clock, we shut down our operations and went to the edge of the river for a special service. Pastor Ronaldo and Uncle Lowell baptized 5 new converts – two couples and a young man. There was a good crowd there to witness it. Immediately afterwards, we had a service back on land that was well attended as well. No decisions but the message was shared.

The trek to and from the AMOR/Beatriz is getting a bit difficult. The currents in the narrow creek are increasing with each roundtrip we make. It is good that tomorrow is our last day in the lakes. By Sunday I believe the entry will not be navigable. Time to move on...

I called Anderson (our driver) back in Manaus this afternoon. He was able to recover 6 of our 7 bags from Copa Airlines! The box with our "suction unit" is one of them! He is putting them all on a boat tomorrow. We should get them early Sunday morning – Uncle Lowell will finally be able to change his boxer shorts and brush his teeth...

The gator hunters our out again tonight. After drawing a blank last night, I believe they are more determined than ever to bring something in – we shall see. Our team is well. No major problems with body, mind and soul. We are enjoying each others fellowship. The food is good and the Beatriz is comfortable. I couldn't ask for much more for this day. It has been a good one indeed.

Observation: We receive a great number of comments on our "Blog" each day. We print all of it out and have a "mail call" each morning. We do not respond to the individual comments because of the cost involved for access via satellite. If somebody out there would like to "fund" our internet access, we would appreciate it very much! Just let us know.

*Saturday, August 4, 2007*

Today was spent at the place where I least wanted to spend time in, but now, the place I most enjoyed working. Funny how it seems to work out that way for me most of the time.

The cruise to Vila Manaus was exciting as usual. At least it was the last time for awhile. The currents are so strong in the tight creek we have to use that steering is difficult. Going downstream, we have little control because of the sheer speed.

Coming up, we barely make headway. All part of the deal – Just glad we have a creek to be going through...

Vila Manaus is huge. I was apprehensive about coming here because of the size and proximity to Boa Vista. I just figured they would have all they need with regard to physical help and the gospel. Well, I was wrong. There is no evangelical work in this place. They have kept it out intentionally over the years. It is probably why they don't have the blessing of good health as well.

We barely scratched the surface in all respects here. VBS had a good, big bunch. Medical and dental just worked till we stopped. At the end, we had a service. Many, many children present. I am glad for the children. They hear and remember. God touches their hearts and engraves on their mind the stories and songs – one day this will help them with the choices they need to make in life.

The vice-president of the community, Alixandre, and his wife Bel walked me to the AMOR/Betty at the end of the day. I picked up and carried a two-year-old little girl all the way. The couple told me she was orphaned 3 months ago. Well, if my wife were here, Sabrina would probably be on her way home with us right now. I melt in these situations. I am offered children frequently. Sometimes it's harder than others to say no... Someday, I'll just say yes and my life will be changed forever, once again. God will have to point the way very clearly though.

We are now underway to Boa Vista where we will drop off Abraao and the AMOR/Betty. Then, on to the mouth of Lago Preto where we will rendezvous with Pastor Edno in the morning. Ronaldo and I had a long talk about "God's will" this evening. He did most of the talking. I just listened and encouraged him to sit quietly at some point and see where God leads. I am very cautious about giving someone advice on God's will for their life. It is a very personal thing that has far-reaching blessings and/or consequences. I just encourage folks to shut up, open their eyes and live the day out. God will show what He shows and it is always good...

It is 2:30 Sunday morning, August 5th and our lost luggage was just delivered to our vessel. There is still time for a couple hour nap and that's just what I plan to do right now. The fog is thick. The sunrise is only a couple hours away. I look forward to the new day...

*Sunday, August 5, 2007*

The morning came early! When I got up, the day was dawning. Pastor Edno was already pulled along side the Beatriz in the AMOR/Teresa. Pastor Ronaldo has decided to continue on with us so he is in toe as well with the AMOR/Blough. We were underway to Lago Preto by six o'clock as the fog lifted.

The passage to the lakes was clear this morning. Earlier in the year, with our team from Walnut Street Baptist, Louisville, we had to cut and push through thick floating grass islands (tapagem) to get in. This was a breeze in comparison.

We went straight to Sagrado! I love this place. It is a community where, just 3 short years ago, the gospel was not welcomed. Today, there is a strong gospel presence and Walnut Street has provided them with a church building as well. It is amazing to see how God can change the heart of a community overnight. Everybody here sends hugs and kisses to the folks back in Louisville!

It was a good day of ministry. We came unannounced. We saw everyone there was to be seen and the children had a great time in VBS. Bill and Jason built a pulpit for the church; Pastor Edno and Uncle Lowell grew a year older. Today, Edno turns 33 and Uncle Lowell hit 68! We had stuffed Pirarucu for lunch to celebrate.

Aunt Bootsie and I slipped off early today so I could show here Winston's (my brother) grave. We spent a few minutes tracing over the name on his wooden cross with a black marker. It is a beautiful spot in front of the church, overlooking the lake – what a view... His legacy lives on here. The people loved him dearly. His presence is missed indeed.

The house was packed for tonight's service. People were standing in the isles. It was good to see such a great turnout. The people of Sagrado have become true family. Lots of smiles. Lots of history here. I thank God for what He has done in these lives.

When we got back to the Beatriz, balloons and cake awaited Lowell and Edno! It was a fun surprise deal. We are now underway to parts unknown just outside the lake. I just saw Pricilla and Stacy sneaking around painting my crew's toenails as they sleep. All is well aboard the AMOR/Beatriz...

We are headed to the community of Enciada. Never been there before. Not particularly welcomed either, for that matter. We all look forward to what the morning will bring. It is all a true adventure as God unfolds it. I can't think of any place I'd rather be today. It is good to be part of it. It is all good.

*Monday, August 6, 2007*

Woke up this morning and went to Enciada early with Pastor Edno. I was a little anxious to meet the leadership and see the lay of the land. The Catholic Church has sent 2 missionaries over to teach some kind of study to the adults and children here – maybe a course on how to pray to St. Andrew's mother's, sister's niece or something. I'm just as apposed to any other denomination coming in and preaching their traditions rather than the Saving Grace of Christ – I make no exceptions and allow little room for man-made gibberish. I don't have or make

time for it at all... Bless their hearts... The attempt here is to distract from the work with the children and any other sort of evangelical activity. It didn't work for them very well at all. We are here to help in any way we can – the people tend to figure that out real quick.

We are here because God opened the door for us to enter. Two days ago, we had no idea that Enciada was our next destination. God had it all ready for us. All we had to do was show up. What beautiful things I have witnessed here this day.

First, we set up clinic and started seeing patients. I did several “house” and “boat” calls throughout the day but mainly stayed in dental with Diane loyally by my side. As the day progressed, VBS had a big turnout of children and young adults at both sessions. The people seemed to open up showing a very kind and friendly side. My expectations were shattered – where are all the mean, rude people I expected to meet up with?!?!?!?

Second, we worked longer and harder here than we have the entire trip. Yet, the hours flew by like minutes. We just plugged along and ministered. Medical saw everything from near-severed limbs to a 12 year-old girl that is probably pregnant. Pretty wide range of situations indeed. We worked till 6 o'clock, and then went to the village pavilion for a quick service.

Well, I'm still in awe about the service. Edno shared. We all pretty much got eaten alive by the mosquitoes and poto (like the “pee” bug back in Missouri). But the singing and preaching went on.

Edno was on fire tonight. He preached John 3:16 with a passion. The anointing of God upon him was obvious. When he gave the invitation, I couldn't see what was going on because I was on the front row with my back to the crowd. When those who raised their hands were asked to come up front, they just kept coming. Thirty-four is all! Wow! What a deal.

After the service, we gave a bible to each one that made a decision; took their names down so Edno can come visit them again soon. Among the 34 was the community teacher and, I believe, the vice-president of the community. These might help lead this new church – who cares about that right now though – this is simply awesome. I'll just bask in it right now and let God figure out the leader...

It has been a day, for sure. God did more for and through us than I could possibly have imagined when I got up this morning. Living each day as He dishes it out is the way I choose to live. I couldn't begin to plan for what He already has figured out. I think I'll just keep it simple and do it His way, each day I wake up.

Our team is a little “bug bit” but doing very well. Our spirits are high. The gator hunters were successful. It's time for me to lie down and rest a bit. Tomorrow is

our last day on location. We will begin the cruise up-river to Manaus some time tomorrow. Thank You Lord for the exceptionally good day.

*Tuesday, August 07, 2007*

It is 2 PM and we are at anchor. The AMOR/Dan Shipley just arrived from medivacing two patients to Boa Vista do Ramos. We will be underway to Manaus in a few minutes.

This morning was different from most others this trip. We had just gotten set up and working at the clinic when a frantic man arrived with the news that his wife had given birth at 2 AM and had been unable to deliver the placenta. Well, that kinda changed the direction of my world for the rest of the morning.

I finished the patient that was in my chair and off we went up the lake. Jamie went along as well as Pastor Edno. When we arrived, the picture changed even more – the newborn was in a tiny casket just outside the house under the shade of an outbuilding.

The mother was in a dark, hot room (I don't know why they do that) lying in a hammock. I had the window opened and examined her, cleaned her up and determined that too much time had past to try and re-deliver the placenta – excessive bleeding would surely occur and we would have no sure way of stopping in. So, we packed her up and carried her to the johnboat.

Her husband arrived just in time to go with us. We were back at the Beatriz within minutes. When we got there, phase two of the day was unfolding...

A young man was waiting for us with a fresh surucucu (3-step snake) bite. What a deal... It was 10:30 and he had been bitten at 9 o'clock. Forty-five minutes is the telling point in the severity of the bite. He wasn't dead so he is pretty much out of harms' way. I gave him some pain meds and packed him up for Boa Vista as well. When the AMOR/Dan Shipley was fully fueled and stocked with food and water, we sent her off to Boa Vista to deliver the patients to the hospital.

The morning was spent how it was meant to be spent, not how I would have planned it. For sure, God had us at Enciada for multiple purposes these past couple of days. He positioned us right where He wanted us to be... It was a privilege for our team to be of service in the various ways. It was a profound privilege to have seen the 34 new brothers and sisters enter the Family last night. It was humbling to have been involved in the saving of lives.

It is 3 PM. We are now underway. Over the next day or so, there will be time for reflecting on the events and occurrences of the past nine days for those who care to reflect. For me, a bit of retrospection is good for the mind and soul – not trying to find “hidden” meaning; just remembering stuff. It will be a change to not have

an immediate destination for the next day or so. I look forward to the fellowship and the cruise.

I will try to make another entry From the Helm tomorrow morning. It has been good to be able to share in this way...