

From the Helm
Iowa/Minnesota
January 15-25, 2007
Mundurucu Indian Nation

Sunday, January 14, 2007

- Here I sit at the Little Rock airport. It is 4:57 AM. I am waiting for my 6 o'clock flight to Orlando. Cida and I drove in last night under rain and fog. She is back at the hotel resting.

I am looking forward to the days ahead. Spoke with Van on the way last night – we are hoping the group flies today or tomorrow. Bad weather is moving in – much snow and ice up his way. Even if I am the *only* one that makes it to Manaus, we will do this trip to the Mundurucu Nation!

- This is a different and special trip for me. For the first time that I can really remember in many years, my mind is of a different nature. I feel relaxed and anxious at the same time. So much has taken place in my life since the season ended back in August. Some of it, liberating. Some of it confusing. Some of it depressing. *All* of it, life changing and ultimately positive.

The past couple of weeks I have frequently found myself in a fog of reality. So much has felt surreal. I have floated through and attempted to function in the moment. However, the realities of things present and those perceived have overwhelmed me at times. I have been fortunate to have had a friends and family to call to level myself out when I need it!

- Arrived in Orlando on schedule and quickly met up with Richard, Jim and Sandy. We had lunch and got underway to Panama City right on schedule. The flight was absolutely packed. No room for our carry-on bags, so we had to straddle them all the way between and under our legs. Arrived in Panama and promptly went to the hotel that Cida had found for us. This place is so very Latin and tropical. If not for the Spanish being uttered all around me, this could easily be Brasil.

Richard and I had dinner after getting settled. I ordered baby lobster tails and rice. Wow! How good it tasted. What a banquet for 14 bucks. I actually ordered shrimp – all they had was baby lobster – gee, I just had to suffer through it...

It is 9:30 PM and I have spoken to Cida and Garver a number of times since I got here. I am so very tired. Last night, Cida and I didn't get to bed until after midnight and I was unable to get any restful sleep before I was on my feet at 3 AM. I look forward to a peaceful night of rest...

Monday, January 15, 2007

What an incredible day this has been. I am here at the Riande Hotel in downtown Panama City, Panama – not at all the place I woke up this morning planning to be right now – I planned on being in Manaus waiting for the group to arrive...

- When we got to the airport this morning, all went well until time to board the plane. I was *not* allowed to board because my Yellow Fever shot is out of date by about 45-50 days – what a deal...

We spent hours trying to figure everything out about what to do with Richard, me, the group, etc. I have seldom had such a feeling of hopelessness as I did during those hours. After I had about gone insane with it all, I just silently said a little prayer and turned it over to God. Amazing what can happen when *that* happens. Almost immediately, the manager of COPA Air came and assumed all responsibility for me haven even gotten out of Orlando! She just gave orders to get it taken care of at COPA's expense.

I spoke with Cida a dozen times trying to get me back to the USA so that I could turn around and go to Manaus direct from Miami (Brazil does not require the vaccine from USA departure points). The price to do this was anywhere from \$1,500 to \$3,500 along with 2 days to get there – not something I desired or felt that we are able to do. After looking at all the options, an amazing thing happened - an angel appeared in the form of a young man from COPA. He looked at the situation, made a couple of calls, got us hotel vouchers, cab vouchers and assured us we could fly on Wednesday – then, he disappeared. My head was throbbing from the pressure but, this too, soon subsided. We got to the hotel, I had a cup of coffee and here I sit in my room, thankful to be here. When all of this started, I wasn't even sure I was happy to be anywhere at all. God is faithful – how many times will I have to learn this simple truth the hard way... Angels exist. Divine help is all around when human capability fails...

Tuesday, January 16, 2007

- Awoke at around six this morning. I didn't rest very well last night. Not really sure why. Probably the anticipation of the shot and other matters absolutely none of my business to worry about. But, I was good to go.

Made my phone calls first thing. Cida is well. The group arrived and I finally got to speak to Van. The team is rested and in good spirits. They lost a couple of bags so, they needed to hang around for a day anyway. I felt much better about being late.

- Went to get my shot at 7:50. That went well. So, now I have fresh little Yellow Fever bugs running around in my body. I don't know what the deal is but I felt almost instantly ill with the disease! Wow. The mind is a strange and mysterious beast indeed...

After the shot, I paid a little extra to the cab driver to take Richard and me over to see the Panama Canal. We were in the neighborhood anyway. Amazing sight to see. We watched a couple of ships run through the locks and took a bunch of pictures. It was good to see a bit of this country that I probably would never have seen if the circumstances had been different. Turned out to be a good morning.

- Arrived back at the hotel a little before noon. Took a few more calls and answered my emails. My arm is letting me know that it was defiled earlier in the day. I thought about looking up the side affects of the shot on the web but, came to my senses realizing that by the time I finished reading about all the possibilities, I would surely be deathly ill! Some things are best left for research at a more appropriate time...

- It has been a productive day (not that I could define "productive" at this point). I've spent the balance of the afternoon answering mail, writing mail that I hope to have to answer soon and craving coffee a little more than I should. Here at the hotel, I have to go down to the restaurant and ask for a cup each time – they give me about 2 fingers of espresso and that's it! Oh well...

I took a walk around the block late this afternoon. I found a cobbler's shop and decided to glue my old Johnson & Murphy's back together again. I have had them for 7 years and love the way they fit and wear. I've glued the soles countless times – this fix will get us down the road a few more miles. These old shoes have tasted soils of this earth that are as varied as the mud of the Amazon rain forest after a good rain to "elite" halls of speaking engagements back in the USA. I prefer the former... Cida just prefers that I get a new pair!

- Time to go down for the night. I am not tired but my head is throbbing for some reason. I'm sure it is just part of this new "disease" running through my veins.

Wednesday, January 17, 2007

Hardly remember sleeping at all last night. My head would only stop hurting when I sat up in bed. So, I slept sitting up most of the night. Got up this morning and the headache was gone though. It must be caffeine withdrawal – it is the only thing I can figure...

Had breakfast and checked out by 7:30. Headed to the airport to try and fly. I was somewhat anxious every step of the way. I got up this morning determined not to worry about things outside of my direct control. So, at least I was rather mellow in my anxiety...

This "vaccine" thing has got me humbled. This is a good thing. I went through every step of checking in, immigration and boarding just on the edge of restlessness. Each step reminded me that I needed to have faith that God had taken care of these larger things.

When we finally arrive in Manaus, there was *nobody* at the Health Department booth to check my immunization card! I was relieved, disappointed and grateful all at the same

time! Anyway, I now look forward to finding out just why the Lord allowed for all of the delays, frustrations and sidesteps on this trip so far. A glimpse of the “heavenlies” would certainly reveal the reasons behind this madness...

When Richard and I walked through the doors after clearing Customs, there stood T & T, Wellington and Anderson – What sights for sore eyes!

We visited, took care of business, bought Richard’s flight home to Santarem and then went to the Tropical to board the Beatriz. She was a sight for these weary eyes to behold. She is beautiful – She is “home”...

After fueling, we were underway by a little after nine this evening. The group is doing quite well. Had a great time visiting after dinner. All is well. We are on our way to the Canuma. It is time to rest for awhile.

Thursday, January 18, 2007

Woke to the gentle bounce of a passing ship at 5:30 this morning just before turning at the mouth of the Madeira River. Got a shower and felt human by six. I don’t remember a thing from the time I lay down until I woke up. At some point in the night, we stopped at Wellington’s and picked up the “T&T” and the “Phillip”. We stored them there at the end of the season last year. The result of that wisdom is that they are still brand new!

- Spoke with Mike early this morning. Good to hear his voice. Cida and the boys are good too. Alan put braces on Matthew’s teeth yesterday. He got “Bomber” colors (blue and gold)! I’m sure he must feel like he has a mouth full. We are very grateful that Alan and Linda take care of our family. They have been dear friends and family for 20 + years now. I thank God for such gifts.

- It has been a slow morning. Just visiting and cruising. I have my old crew onboard – no surprises and no orders need be given. All pretty automatic. ETA for Nova Olinda is set for 1:30 this afternoon – about 24 hours later than we had planned. Abraao should be about fit to be tied right about now. Oh well, plans sometimes (almost *always* in my case) change. Usually, these changes should have been the plan all along.

- It is 2:30 PM and we are arriving at the mouth of the igarape that leads to the Canuma River. We should be rendezvousing with Ps. Abraao and Ps. Ronaldo in an hour or so. It will be good to see them both and their families.

- Amazing thing, this afternoon has been. When we arrived in Foz do Canuma, both the AMOR/Blough and the AMOR/Betty were in port. The Beatriz held off shore while I took the T&T in to speak with the pastors. When I got to shore, I could tell that Abraao was not exactly the happiest of campers and Ronaldo seemed a bit ill at ease himself. So, I asked them to come out to tow position beside the Beatriz so that we could visit and travel. That they did.

I called Abraao and his family up to the second deck first. Evidently, he was given instructions to move back to Boa Vista and for Ronaldo to move up here. Well, I know a little bit more of the situation than I care to share. So, I simplified the dialogue down to where *he* felt that God was calling him to minister – not where he was being *told* to minister. He and his wife stated, in unison, that they felt led to minister here to the Mundurucu nation. Ok with me. I have felt this is where he should remain as well.

Then, I called Ronaldo and his wife up and had the same conversation and posed the same question to them. They said that they felt called to work below Boa Vista, where they were serving to begin with. Wow. Amazing how God works things like this out. God doesn't call two couples to work the same area. I know this well. It was reaffirming to see God's conviction and calling so simply and plainly expressed today. These are two good and faithful couples. They will be used tremendously in reaching souls for Christ here in the Valley.

- We are just about to Kuata, our first destination. It is 6:49 PM. The night is still young...

I have just been informed that we have lost our water fill pump. Not real good news. The boys have been trying to get our spare pump to work but have had no luck at all. We have modified our bilge pump on our main engine to do the job for now. In the morning early, Big John will head for town to try and fix our old pump and buy a new one as well. Simple solutions to major problems. I'm just glad we have water.

It is 10 PM and the group seems to have been asleep for a couple of hours already. I had a quick shower and am feeling like I could sleep a bit. So, I will try and do just that...

Friday, January 19, 2007

It was 4:50 before I got out of my hammock this morning. Big John just left with Ps. Ronaldo to seek out a new pump for us. The AMOR/Blough needs a new alternator. They will try and get that taken care of too.

- I am a little anxious this morning. Nothing major, just that small "edge" that I would be inhuman *not* to feel on the first day on location in 6 months. God already has this day worked out. I need but get it done the way He maps it out. I look forward to visiting with Mama Ester and Tuchaua Manuel. This will be a good day. It is 5:55. Abraao is pulling along side the Beatriz for breakfast. The day is beginning.

- Went to see Tuchaua Manuel at 700. All is well with him and Mama Ester. They were waiting for us to come and visit. We will have the clinic at the clinic, as usual and he asked if I would pull some teeth – I told him that I would. The construction team will close in the chief's brother's house with siding. It should be a good two days among friends.

- It is 1:00 PM and we just finished lunch. Big John and the pastor are back. The pump is working properly, thank God. We are mechanically back to normal... I pulled several teeth this morning – glad to help. Justin started out helping me then decided it might not be the right, best job for him after all. So, Abraao's daughter, Val, helped me the last couple of hours of the morning.

- I called Cida a few minutes ago. She is hanging in there. Trying to get AMOR's books in order – figure out what has been paid and what still needs to be paid. William saw the doctor this morning. Cida says that he wants to run some more breathing and possibly some cardiovascular tests. My heart sunk a bit with the news. We will get this done as soon as possible. William gets short of breath after exercising. Something we have been dealing with for about 10 years now. I truly hope that God will lead us to the right doctor that will properly diagnose whatever the problem might be. Please Lord...

It has been raining for the past couple of hours. It is time to go back to work though. I think it's time indeed. Good to be of service once again.

- The afternoon went quickly. Between pulling teeth, giving out the toys Grandpa and Nana sent to give the children and debreeding a stingray sting, it was 5 PM before I even realized it.

We are at anchor right now awaiting dinner. Several swam under a light rain. I got me a good hot shower and fell suddenly rejuvenated. Watching everyone swim brought to mind what happened to Abraao's wife this morning! When she got up, she went out to the stern of the AMOR/Betty to brush her teeth. Well, when she knelt down, 3 huge gators swirled within 15 feet or so of her then surfaced further out! Wow. And they ask me why I hunt the things – I don't like them around me, that's why!!

- William is still on my mind right now. When I arrive home, I hit the situation as head-on as it takes to take care of my baby boy. Can't do anything from right here, right now. So, I will just pray and concentrate on my work...

Saturday, January 20, 2007

- At 2:30 this morning, I woke up Carlinho and Big John to put down the flaps and mop the decks. It had been raining for God knows how long. Carlinho was sleeping in the pilot house and still didn't get up to do his job. An unfortunate way for me to wake up this morning. I finally lay down in my wet hammock and snoozed for a couple of more hours.

- Everyone slept in this morning. I had to wake everyone up to eat breakfast at six! Good to see everyone is at least comfortable enough to sleep through the night.

Lat night's service was uplifting. There was a good crowd. The children sang enthusiastically. Mama Ester gave a little bit of her testimony, as did Jason, then Abraao preached on "transformation" from the "water into wine" story. No public decisions – good evening.

Walking to the service last night a man approached me very sheepishly and asked if he could talk to me. Of course I said yes and slowed my pace. The subject of his conversation was about attending our next RBBI but what he said about *me* was alarming and disturbing. He was apologetic about being a bother to me. That everyone would like to approach me but I am always so busy, no one dares try and talk to me. I was devastated because I realized that that is how I must appear to those around me. I commit right now to be very aware of those around me today – to stop and make time for anyone that desires to approach me today. I am grateful that God used this man last night to affect change in me. My God, how people close to me must feel about this matter as well. It really doesn't matter what they think. It matters what *I* think. I think it's putrid, disgusting...

- It is 4 PM and we just pulled away from Kuata, on time. All teams accomplished whatever it was that was to be accomplished here. I engaged in several good meeting today. I just let the day unfold as I went. Was able to pull 8-10 teeth in between. Good day overall.

As we were pulling away, Daniel brought up a snake he had found to the group. Well, the minute I set eyes on it, I knew it was a surucucu! We all took some pictures. When I told Daniel what kind of snake it was, several shades of color seemed to drain from his face. He promptly pitched it overboard. So much for swimming this evening...

- I met with Raimundo Brasil (the one who invited me to his house last evening). Had a great time. He served me a drink made from the manioc root that I had never tried before. It tasted something like sour mash but had not been through all the fermenting yet, thank God... I thought I had tried about everything. I guess not.

We talked about the RBBI in April (13-23). He will be there. There has been a Regular Baptist minister coming around since we started the work back up in here. He wants to take the "harvest". I really wouldn't mind if he wasn't all about "us and them". I just trust in the Lord to take care of His work.

- Visited with Mama Ester for a good little bit about the work here in Kuata as well. She is a wise little old lady. She wants a leader to rise up to take the head of the church. In the mean time, she is committed to keep the doors open and to going house-to-house gathering the scattered remnant. God will bless her efforts. I look forward to seeing what takes place over the next 6 months. I will be bringing Arkadelphia here in mid-July.

Talked to Tuchaua Manuel last of all. He just wanted to ask us to dig a well, if we could, in July. I told him that I would request this as a project from the group. I think this would be cool indeed...

- It is 5:30 PM. We are now cruising toward Aru, our second stop in this venture. Filipino will head to Nova Olinda tomorrow with Big John to buy some groceries to get us back to Manaus. We really were not prepared for 11 extra mouths on the trip! No problem. I like it. We just need to re-stock a bit. No service tonight. Aru is having a folklore party. We will go ashore in the morning. Just a night of mellow resting aboard.

Sunday, January 21, 2007

I got up at 3 this morning. The music from shore was pretty loud. The bottle rockets were firing in the sky. It is 5:30 right now and Aru has been having quite a party all night long. When Abraao comes along side, we will know the "state of affairs" and determine what we will do today.

Filipino and Big John just left on the supply trip. I expect them back when they get back. Probably around Noon. Go with God, boys.

- Last night I had a long talk with Van about recovery programs. We are, and have been, involved with this type of work for many years now. It was good to talk about all the possibilities. Maybe someday it will work out here in the Valley. If it does, it does. Recovery from any kind of addiction occurs *only* when the person involved is done; bottomed out; aware that they are powerless and unmanageable; surrendered. Then there is hope. God will do great works in a pliable live. I've rarely seen Him work in any other manner.

- When we got ashore in Aru, their little world was drunk as it could be. How unfortunate. We met the Captain and the Health agent and explained that we would need to seek out another community. He was apologetic and I was saddened. What a shame they will have to call upon their patron saint to help them out. He is the one they have been partying about for the past 3 days. Unfortunate indeed...

- We cruised about an hour to the village of Fronteira. This is where Mara got deathly ill last year. This is a village that in 2005, first, refused us; then, allowed us to come but we had to leave our cameras on the boat. Wow, what a different place it is today! They welcomed us with open arms. It has been a good day of service here among them.

Just after noon, Ps. Ronaldo brought a 17 year old girl to me to check out her eyes. I walked over to that area of the "clinic", knelt down beside her and listened to her story. There is nothing anyone can do about her situation. Her retinas are destroyed. Maybe by heat, extreme light, not sure. Their just gone. She has been blind since age 13. Her mother died six months ago. She is a Christian and that makes all the difference in her countenance. What a blessing her life and presence was to me today. I have so much to thank God for.

- Overall, the day clicked by as God planned it. Construction put together a little concession (using screws this time – in May, the team built a couple of these structures here. Not long after we left, the people took them apart and cannibalized the lumber. With the screws, they will have to tear up the wood trying to take this thing apart!)

Medical treated a steady line of patients; VBS had a “bunch” indeed; I pulled a dozen or so teeth. All work went well

It is 6:40 in the evening. We had an early worship service and got underway. The Beatriz stalled for about 30 minutes. Our Turbo is not engaging – it is in dier need of an overhaul. As a result, the oil builds up in the chamber and backs back in to the engine somehow. Well, we finally got re-started and are now cruising toward Sauru. We plan on working the day there tomorrow. Just have to see what pans out. It will be what God desires, no matter what the events bring our way...

Monday, January 22, 2007

Slept very well last night. Relatively sound all the way to 5 AM. Abraao pulled along side at six.

The crew is trying to get our holding tanks to discharge right now. We have had a string of little “happenings” take place on the trip that have just kept me on the edge of a “what next” attitude. But, I’ve been fighting it. I’d rather go through the day blissfully than in “impending doom” mode... I just want to get to shore and see what happens there today.

- Paraua is everything that I remembered it to be, and more. Walking up the hill, the first hut that I came to was Gabi’s house. This is the little girl that stole my heart 3 years ago. She is physically confined to her chair and mildly autistic. Wow, it was good to see her again; to carry her around in my arms – such a beautiful soul...

The day went by rapidly. It was relaxing. I pulled something over 20 teeth while everybody else did their thing as well. One of the special highlights of it all was the baptism of Justin and Andrea this afternoon. I couldn’t help but visualize William and Phillip doing the same several years ago – good stuff...

- I have come to realize that maybe the projects here in the Mundurucu region (and perhaps beyond) may be the drilling of water wells. I will have the equipment looked over between now and May to make sure it is good to go. It is a ministry that we are set to run with; that is needed; that we should be very open to engaging in. I thank Murray for getting the equipment re-fitted a couple of years ago.

- Had some good fellowship on the Beatriz before the service this evening. Discussed spiritual warfare, origin of man, etc. Got absolutely nothing settled but, what else is new...

The service was a good time. Lots of singing. Ps. Abraao preached on Matthew 8:1-4. One young girl accepted Christ. Worth the whole trip right there...

- I am tired tonight. We leave for our final stop, Sauru, in the morning early. Our time on location has flown by – don't know where it went. Just know it's time to go home. It has been good talking to Cida everyday for just a minute or so. Just good to stay in touch with the other world while I'm out here. I thank God for how he meshes them both together in such a perfect way – most of the time.

Tuesday, January 23, 2007

- Got up for good at 3 this morning. Just had enough sleep I guess. Been sitting here nursing cold coffee and enjoying my own company. It wasn't always that I was able to enjoy such a scenario.

I hear the cooks messing around downstairs. "Today's" coffee should be up in a few minutes.

- Docked at Sauru just before 7 AM. I love this place. The Tuchaua has become a friend. I went up alone so, we chatted a good bit about this and that.

We set up clinic in the Assembly of God church as we've done in the past. Medical and I just worked through until we had finished with everyone in the community. I pulled 12 on my last patient. Reminded me of the old days...

- After work, I bought several pieces of jewelry from the locals. There hasn't been that much available this time around. I've been trying to buy it for the group. Not much to choose from.

After the day's work, our time on location for this trip was over. My how it flew by... So much to reflect on. So much to absorb. I plan on doing this in the morning during our trek homeward. We met with both pastors and their families before departing. I met with each of the pastors about their needs, etc. It was a good time together, then, the broke off from us and we were underway for Manaus... ETA, 4 PM tomorrow afternoon.

As we were getting ready to break away, one of my crew was helping Ps. Ronaldo crank the AMOR/Blough's engine. The crank handle slipped off, flew up in his face, hitting him in the mouth! He had a large, gapping hole through his lower lip and chipped a tooth pretty good. Andrea and I cleaned him up and put 2 stitches in side and a couple outside his mouth. He should survive – just won't be comfortable at all for the next few days...

We are now in the Igarape that leads to the Madeira River. I didn't get a chance to call Cida this morning. Just too much going on. I may try later this evening. I am looking forward to the cruise homeward.

Wednesday, January 24, 2007

Woke up and got up when we ran aground in the fog at 3 AM. Couldn't see 3 feet in front of us. So, I just sat and had coffee in the haze. By 4:15, we were underway once again.

Arrived at Wellington's at 5:50 this morning. He was just finishing up milking his buffalo. What magnificent animals. They weight, on average, 2,400 lbs. and are very docile. He has given them each a ladies name. It was comical to hear him cal for "Mary Alice", "Sister Sarah", etc. It would be interesting to know who he has named them after...

We winched the AMOR/T&T to shore and offloaded some roofing and siding. Took on some fresh curd cheese; then, onward to Manaus. ETA, 2 PM.

Reflections:

As this trip comes to a close, I look back on what were the main high and low spots along the way. In reality, I have seen no real "low" spots, but a number of highs.

As I began this venture, I stated that my mindset was different form that of years gone by. I found that, as a result, there was an underlying peace and serenity that occupied the space in my mind and soul that used to house low grade anxiety, agitation and worry. These cancers were absent this time around. I thank God for this.

I feel a new page has turned in God's dealings with me and my understanding of Him. The relationship is much simpler than I've often tried to make it in the past. Very simple now, indeed.

*I have found a great new manager in Wellington. He is someone that I can trust, doesn't need the work, and is very loyal to our family and mission. He will make sure things on this end run smoothly. Carlinho, on the other hand, has disappointed me greatly. I will soon have to deal with letting him go. He has grown poorly accustomed – has quit working – lost his love for our equipment, etc. I guess it comes with being married, a new father and henpecked. Sad state of affairs... Other than this, I feel relatively good with the way things are going here in the Valley. I need to have **much** more contact with our pastors though. I have made a conscious decision to try and do better in communicating. I have given everybody my phone numbers and codes – I trust they will use them often. With Winston no longer here, we are all still adjusting – a void that will be worked and lived around, but never filled.*

God has shown his provision, grace and sovereignty during these past two weeks. He has divinely taken care of me, then the group, then the people to whom we have ministered. His guiding hand couldn't have been more obvious as the days unfolded. He was here before we embarked, while we were here and now, as we prepare to return home.

Thank you lord for keeping me grounded with each passing day. Showing me what and what not to do, say and even think. Thank you for allowing me to live vicariously through and in your provision. I love you – You and I are going to have some great and memorable times together in 2007...