

Walnut Street, Louisville, KY 2008

From the Helm – Sunday, June 8, 2008

Colorado got off yesterday morning for home. I still had time to work for a few hours. Preparations for Louisville are about complete.

I was having difficulty connecting to the internet the last couple of days of the trip last week. I was on the phone quite a bit with our service provider. Hopefully, they will have everything worked out by departure time tomorrow night. It isn't imperative that I have internet but I enjoy sharing the days with everyone who cares to follow along.

Pastor Edno called last night. He is eagerly awaiting our arrival. We plan to drill him a water well in Sagrado. It will be fun trying to get him some fresh water at his new home there.

The Beatriz is a mess today – pretty usual state for a trip's eve. She will be spit and polished by day's end, tomorrow. I look forward to seeing Phillip and Matthew when they arrive with the team. I will miss William. He has college obligations this time around. It's a comfort to know that we are all in just the right place for today. God is good to comfort and direct.

I look forward to the days ahead. Time with the Louisville Team and the folks of Lago Preto. It's all good...

From the Helm – Monday, June 09, 2008

3:00 PM - Well, I'm headed to the *AMOR/Beatriz*. The remainder of the day will be spent fueling, etc.

Phillip and Matthew are in Miami waiting for the Louisville team to get there. They should board and be on their way early this evening.

I will set up the satellite system and try to send an entry tomorrow, sometime. Hopefully, the provider got their glitch worked out. If not, I'll catch you up at the end of the trip...

From the Helm – Tuesday, June 10, 2008

The Team arrived right on schedule at 12:30 this morning. One of the members was bumped in Louisville but will arrive at Noon today. Five suitcases were also left behind somewhere along the way.

We have decided to delay our departure a full 24 hours to await the luggage. I've spoken to Pastor Edno several times in the last several hours. He is travelling back in to the Lakes telling everyone that we will be there, eventually.

All are well. It has been great seeing the faces of so many old friends. Good to see Matthew and Phillip! Today, Phillip celebrates his 17th Birthday! Wow, literally seems like just the other day, he was a 2-year-old serving his mother and I mud pies on the farm in South Brasil. My, my my...

We have a bus coming at Noon to take all who want to go on a "city tour". All this will give the crew and staff some extra time to go over the preparations. We are not behind schedule. We are just on the schedule God had for us all along. All is well...

From the Helm – Wednesday, June 11, 2008

It's 10:00 AM and we've been underway since 3:30 this morning. Smooth sailing through the Parana da Eva as I write.

Ken misconnected with the flight in Sao Paulo yesterday morning. So, he spent the day in South Brazil, arriving here last night at 11:30. It was good to finally meet him! Phillip and Matthew took him back to the Beatriz to get settled in while I waited to the team's luggage to arrive on the Miami flight. Three of the five missing pieces showed up and cleared Customs with no problems. Saulo's luggage is still out there somewhere. I made the decision to go ahead without it. Anderson will pick it up whenever it arrives and will forward it, via line boat, to Boa Vista.

Loss of bags, equipment and the like just reassures me that the "things" we bring are dispensable in God's work. It is good to have it but none of it pivotal in what we are here to do. The less we have of this world's goods to share, the more our dependence grows in Gods care and provision. I have the most problems in my life the more "stuff" I have to manage. I do best when I'm running on empty, simply trusting. I wouldn't trade the way God cares for me for *any* amount of tangible security within my reach. I love watching Him fill my plate with what I need, each passing day.

The team is up and about, sorting supplies and materials. Our expected ETA for meeting up with Edno is 9:00 PM. For now, a little rest. A little fellowship. Much gratitude for this new day and all it will bring.

From the Helm – Thursday, June 12, 2008

3:30 AM – What a fine cruise to the rendezvous with Edno. We made it is 16 hours. The Beatriz is running smoothly and efficiently. Upon connecting with Edno, we decided to enter a bit into the mouth of Lago Preto before setting anchor. Even in the black of night, the meandering, slow cruise through the tight overhang was beautiful. ..

Within a couple of hours after dawn, we should be on location in Sagrado. The night was good for sleep and I took advantage of it. I feel fit and rested this morning. All are well and ready for the day's unfolding. My, it is good to be alive and able to participate in this awesome adventure of following as He leads. Quite indescribable...

6:30 PM – We arrived in Sagrado and went ashore at 8 this morning. The whole community came out to welcome the Team. There were banners and flags and lots and lots of children. So many friends here. A beautiful beginning for us all.

Medical did several surgeries ranging from fatty tumors to chainsaw accidents. Dental was steady. VBS, according to a tired Pam, had at least 1007! The well equipment was set up and drilling has begun over at Edno's place. A good, full first day on location...

While I was doing Edno's mother's eyes this afternoon, the old pastor from up the river that I had done surgery on last year showed up. This is a gentle, delicate old man of about 90. He had come to me last year with cataracts. They were pretty much beyond repair. I removed the "carne cresida" just to make him more comfortable. Two months after the surgery, he fell from his hammock, hitting his head and losing the remainder of his sight. I tell you what though, his spirit is still sweet. His acceptance of the way things are was an inspiration to me. God indeed comforts beyond imagination those who depend on Him *completely* and live by His grace. He is good and faithful through *any* and *all* circumstances.

It is now 10:00 PM. The service was hindered by the rain and mud on shore. Nonetheless, many showed up to hear and worship. It was a good way to end this good day. I am tired. I am well. I am grateful for it all...

I continue having some trouble calling out at times. Either the internet or the phone is offline most of the time. I guess if I really need to call or write, it will all work perfectly. For now, just a peaceful night of sleep sounds good to me.

From the Helm – Friday, June 13, 2008

Wow, what a day. One of those days so filled with various activities and events that when it ended, it seemed more like several days wrapped into one. All of it good. Just a *bunch* of it all!

All teams were on location by 8 AM. It was clear to me early on that God would intervene to make sure all that truly needed physical help would receive it. Seeing everyone who was actually waiting would be humanly impossible. I have not witnessed such crowds in a good long time. It is humbling. Our medical staff was all over the place. One team shot off to nearby villages for "boat calls" while the other team stayed back in Sagrado. The travelling team had some beautiful experiences I look forward to hearing about. They ended up working through the service this evening, returning to the Beatriz at a little past 7 PM. Lots and lots of people were helped today – I love it.

Dental saw mainly children! Most that were brought to David and me were between the ages of 4 and 9. However laborious these babies are to work on, they give me confirmation that I am in the right place doing the right thing for the day – These children are in pain and need someone to gently relieve them. What a privilege to be allowed to help out in this way.

The post-op on yesterdays' eyes went well. No complications, as expected.

VBS had a great day as well! I was told today that during the year, the kids play “Pastor Rusty and Momma” games where they take turns pretending to be Rusty and Pam playing games with the rest of the kids. Pretty cool! The impact we have on our surroundings is immeasurable. Our accountability is high. Lives will be impacted by our presence – this is, once again, a humbling deal indeed...

The “well guys” got stuck between a rock and a hard spot, literally. After drilling through several rock shelves, the weight of the debris was too great for our water pump to raise. The project had to be abandoned at 20 feet. We will get a more powerful pumping station for next time. We did all we could do. We will bring Edno a well when the time is right – hopefully, the next time we come by.

The service this evening was beautiful. Cilene and the community gave an awesome presentation for the team. These are a gracious and giving folk. It is amazing that Sagrado was the most apposed to our entering Black Lake, even violently so, 5 years ago. Today, we are having meals with them and watching there children grow into young men and women. These are matters of the heart that only God can influence to change. Today's relationships in this community were not humanly possible in the beginning. They are divinely appointed, indeed. An awesome phenomena to witness. I see it over and over again throughout the Valley. God transforming hearts.

We are at anchor for the night. All are well. Today has all been good, indeed...

From the Helm – Saturday, June 14, 2008

And now there is Steve... One year and one day ago, today, was born a baby boy that would not have lived, to a mother that would most like have died in childbirth. Steve and Pat Wheeler along with William and others of the medical team provided the life saving talents that made today's reunion possible. When we arrived at Cucui, the proud mother brought the baby to Steve for inspection. She has named the child Steve! What a deal.

On occasion, some will ask me if all the expense, time and effort are worth it to come to these out-of-the-way places. My answer is, unequivocally, *yes!* It is not just the occasional saving of a physical life; the pain relieved in the dental clinics; the eye glasses fitted or the repairs to homes that we are able to share in. My answer is rooted in the hope and assurance that is shared with all who come in contact with us in the course of our travels. The hope, peace and assurance that only Christ can bring.

You see, all my life I searched to fill an emptiness that caused my very being to ache. My soul was hungry for a peace that absolutely nothing of this world managed to appease for sustained periods of time. I was lost and was clueless as to any path to freedom and contentment. In the midst of my searching, I managed to mess up not only my own existence, but also the lives of so many people that loved me and cared about me. Many paid the price of my futile searching.

Then, one day, God was introduced to me for Who He really is. He is the end of my searching. He is what turns a mere existence into a life. He is the everything that my heart and soul had ached for so many years. He is the constant that the tides and turns of life cannot shake. He is faithful, merciful and unchanging. The One that provides sweet rest in the midst of *all* storms. How grateful I am that someone cared enough to share this with me. Someone took the time to patiently show me the way out of the hopeless abyss I had found for myself. And that is why it is worth all the expense, time and effort – so that I may share what I have freely received with those who find themselves where I came from. It is indeed worth it all...

- Our day in Cucui was blessed. The crew waited at the end of our gangplank to bath our feet and ankles with diesel so the chiggers wouldn't eat us! Then, we were set to go.

All teams worked pretty much nonstop through the day. By 5 PM, all was done, including Rusty baptizing a young girl that had requested he do so. It was a neat deal to see.

The evening service was interesting indeed. Henrique led the service and was quite gracious in offering "opportunities" for any and everyone to say a word if they felt like it. After what seemed like 73 sermonettes, the service came to an end at 9:15 PM. The bright spot in it all was that one lady came forward accepting Christ as her Savior. So, I now must live with all my silent ridicule of the lengthy proceedings. Maybe next time, I'll just enjoy the deal for what it is. Surely it will be easier that way! After all, I had all day to live the day anyway. It just lasted longer than *I* thought necessary. Pretty selfless attitude, huh!?!?

We are all quite tired tonight. We are all quite well. I, for one, am grateful for yet another day God has given me to experience. Thank you Lord for allowing me to breath in another day as You unfolded it. I have nothing but gratitude in my heart tonight...

From the Helm – Sunday, June 15, 2008

We slept at anchor just above Cucui last night. Today's early morning cruise to Bom Jesus was breathtaking. The beauty of the rushing river and tight, overhung corners was peaceful. We arrived, set up and were working on location by a little after 8 AM.

The community worked hard preparing for our arrival. The little buildings we utilize for VBS and clinic had the floors repaired and were freshly swept. The people here are

rather shy but very hospitable. Last year, the teacher couple that open their home to the dental team gave all they had for food that day (the hind quarter of a Paca) to the Beatriz as a gift. A selfless act – humbling for me. Acts such as these put so many things in perspective for me. I can't quite identify what all it does, but it's all good.

Construction took the day to help out with the other teams – no repairs or day projects lined up for here.

Due to small quarters, dental set up only one chair and David and I alternated patients – gave us a little time to breath through the day. Medical worked through the day and through the service this evening, managing to see everyone in the community by the time they packed up and bagged out.

VBS was great. I can't begin to describe my fervor for this work with the children. The little faces take on brighter smiles as they listen to the stories, do crafts and play games. These brighter smiles, I'm convinced, result from the seeds planted in their hearts and minds. The way to a fulfilling life has been gently introduced to them though VBS. One day, when their soul calls for understanding and comfort, they will see it for what it is and cling to the God they heard about this day. What a gift they have received. One they will be able to draw on for the rest of their lives. Wow...

8:00 PM – We have just set sail for Ensiada. The sky is clear and the moon so bright our spot lights are scarcely needed to navigate. My hammock is calling. I think I will head the call. It has been another good day. I am grateful, indeed.

Happy Father's Day, Dad. I am grateful to God it worked out for you do be mine. You gave me life in more ways than one. You've been a living example of all a Godly man can be. Although you "spoke" a few lessons along the way – You mainly lived the lessons of life out for me to see. I love you Dad. Thanks for it all...

From the Helm – Tuesday, June 17, 2008

2:00 PM – We've just separated from Pr. Edno on the Parana do Ramos. We left location at 11:30 this morning after our final 4 hours on location. The people of Ensiada were grateful. I believe we leave behind a new community in its infancy. Many, many new Christians.

Edno and his family came topside on the Beatriz for a share-time. He and Josie shared with us their experiences, strength, hope and fears. Their life is a difficult one here in the Lakes. There is much violence, theft and chaos among the locals. The coca leaf traffickers bring with them all manner of evil and disruption. They asked for the Team's continued prayer. I speak with Edno most every week by phone. He calls me every chance he gets. I have followed his plight over the years. I am inspired by his dedication to sharing what God has so freely given him. He and his family will continue to be on my heart and mind.

We are now headed up the Parana toward Manaus. Our cruise speed is a comfortable 1,550 rpm's. Our estimated ETA for Manaus is set for 4 tomorrow afternoon. But, I am confident we will arrive at the exact moment we actually do...

Over the next days I'm sure God will reveal to each of us some of what we witnessed yet did not see during our trip to Black Lake. He is good not to overwhelm me with these things all at once. I look forward to counting the blessings. I'm just grateful He allowed me to have a small part in His bigger plan for these days. What a deal it has been. How grateful I am for it all...

Louisville is scheduled to depart for home on Thursday morning. Mountain Home is scheduled to arrive Monday night. I write a little bit here and there as the urge strikes. For now, I will rest and enjoy the cruise.

From the Helm – Monday, June 16, 2008

We awoke at anchor around a few bends from Ensiada. At a little past 3 this morning a healthy storm came from the West. High winds and lots of rain. The A/C was refreshing to have. I went ahead and enjoyed the early morning. The rain and wind was a nice touch.

Ensiada is a hard community. It has threatened Edno with physical harm if he persisted in coming here. That was two years ago. Last year with a Team from Missouri I, naturally, agreed to Edno's request to visit here. Several were saved but pressure increased for Edno not to return. Several weeks ago, the leaders here met with Edno and agreed to our coming with this Team provided I meet with the bosses and explained our motive for being here.

Well, the meeting took place over lunch. It was short but definitive. I explained that we were here because we wanted for them what God had given us along the way. That we would never share with them something that we could not show them in their own Bibles. That the medical, dental and construction projects were just to help them along with the temporal stuff. The reason and motivation behind it all is that they come to have a living, viable and personal relationship with their Creator through Jesus Christ. By the end of our little meeting, they understood. We are welcomed here, as is Edno, anytime he or we wishes to stop by and visit.

Ensiada has been deceived in the past. People have come here wanting their land and fisheries. They wanted reassurance that we were not of the same breed. We are not and this fact will be proven through our actions more than our words. And that's the way it should be.

It's been hot today. The teams have struggled a bit more than usual with energy levels. Actually, it is about that time, along the course of the trip, when energy is harder to come by anyway! Our departure tomorrow from location will be bitter-sweet. A desire to stay along with the need to go. It's just the way it is. Part of this whole sweet phenomenon...

7:30 PM – There was a remarkable thing take place at this evening’s service. Thirty-eight adults came forward asking Christ into their lives. All for the first time. Only God knows the impact this will have on Ensiada and this region! I watched as they came forward. None, I could recall, are among those who accepted Christ here on our last visit. Absolutely amazing.... Thank You Lord...