

From The Helm

Boyd Walker

Team Walnut Street

Tuesday, June 05, 2007

Walnut Street arrived at 1:20 this morning. By Gods grace, not a single bag was opened in Customs! Don't ask me how these things work; it just worked out this way this time.

It was special to see all the veteran faces as they walked though the doors at the airport. A really special deal was to see my two oldest sons, William and Phillip, come through as well! We have been looking forward to working as a family – I look forward to the days ahead.

We were underway by 2:30 AM, headed for Lago Preto. I estimate we will rendezvous with Pr. Edno some time in the late evening. I spoke with him yesterday evening. All is prepared for us on location. He asked that we minister to 6 different villages over the next six days. This, we will do as God leads and provides.

The AMOR/Beatriz is running beautifully! We did some extensive mechanical work on the generators and our main engine over the weekend. So far, we are cruising well and a bit ahead of schedule. The group rested until 8:30 this morning. We look forward to the day of sailing.

Wednesday, June 06, 2007

Arrived at the mouth of Rio Preto (Lago Preto) at 5:00 last evening. We encountered a huge blockage just beyond the mouth of the lake, made up of floating grass. It was not the best of situations to try and tackle as dark prevailed. So, we turned the Beatriz around and headed back to the Amazon where we anchored for the night. Several of our team went our "gator hunting" last night. They were all successful!! The hunt netted 15 caimans of various sizes. Everyone had great fun and the adrenaline is probably still pumping today! I love to watch it all happen.

– Morning came beautifully today. The sunrise was as glorious as any I have seen. Our crew headed into the lake to begin cutting through the blockage. There was some 200 meters of the growth that had to be removed for our main vessel to pass. Our secondary vessels work furiously for two hours before the Beatriz finally plowed its way to open water on the other side. This is always an adventure with deckhands diving to clear our props and secondary vessels steering the Beatriz so we don't force our rudder.

We arrived at our first destination, Santo Antonio, by 9:15 this morning. All teams were on location and working by 10:00. By 5:30 this afternoon, VBS had held to sessions with a number of pretty lively children and adults present. Medical treated better than 70 patients and dental had a number of extractions and fillings as well. We also did one eye surgery. More are scheduled for tomorrow.

David brought a portable dental unit that was a huge blessing today. The front teeth that we typically have to extract can sometimes be saved now. The full benefit of this new equipment will manifest itself over the next days, week and months. I am excited about having it available for the rest of the year – a good addition to our ministry options.

We just had dinner and are preparing for the evening services. Have no idea how the attendance will be. We are just ready to share with all who will hear, the exact nature of our purpose here – to share the strength, hope and comfort that the Lord has so graciously given us and wants to give to each and every soul in this great lake.

The team is in great health and spirits. God has brought true unity and brotherhood amongst us all. We are all grateful to be a part of this adventure in the Lord...

Thursday, June 7, 2007

During the service last evening, a pretty serious storm began to form out of the South. The Beatriz needed to seek safe harbor so, we cut our activities short and set sail into a nearby cove. The storm never actually hit us – better to be safe anyway...

Today was full indeed here in Santo Antonio. VBS had two sessions with near 100 kids and adults, each! Medical, eyeglasses and dental only stopped because the day had to end sometime – the lines never cease...

Our construction team built a great kitchen addition on to the house of a needy family. It looks great! The way the project came out was SO MUCH nicer than I had imagined. The crew is diligent. They truly did their work as if for the Lord, indeed. Everything else in this village might fly or rot away but I believe this “addition” will outlive us all!

During the course of the day, we saw patients from past trips that came by to visit us. Several of these would not be here, alive, today had the “docs” not been here to provide stabilization for them in the past. It is amazing to me to look back and see the “why” and “how” of the way things happen. God places us where we are needed to perform certain tasks for him at any given time. We only come to understand the magnitude of His perfect will and wisdom in a retrospective manner. It is so important to be flexible, attentive and willing so that He may direct our every step. It is really quite simple – If we abide in Him, there is no great secret as to what the next right thing will be. It is a natural progression. Not a shock or jolt. It is simply the way things are supposed to be.

We ended our day and were bagged out to the Beatriz by 5:00 PM. We decided to hold services at that time to take advantage of the crowd that had gathered. The VBS team and kids sang a bit. So did we. Pr. Edno preached a short but powerful message on “the love of God” from I John. A good number of adults accepted Christ! I interpreted so that our team could follow along. Rusty has been gracious to encourage Edno to preach so that we would be able to know more of his heart and mind and to allow the locals to hear him as well. Rusty is a dear friend indeed. He is a brother to me. It is good to have him here this year.

So, here we are. Cruising through a narrow channel that leads to our next destination, “Arrozal”. We will be here at least through the end of the day tomorrow. It has been a long, productive, peaceful day. The stars are out in indescribable beauty. All are well. The day is settling to a close.

Saturday, June 09, 2007

Awoke this morning off shore of Sagrado. I had been looking forward to revisiting here for some time now. This is the community where, two years ago, we came a day ahead of schedule just to find that this is where God had prepared a lasting blessing that is dear to our hearts to this day.

When we arrived the first time in 2005, Pr. Edno was warned by the community that our physical help was appreciated but the gospel message would, at best, be only tolerated. The people of Sagrado were cold and jaded. Our team just ministered with love and compassion – the rest is history. The veil began to come down. Hearts began to be transformed. Sagrado's world was change forever. A new face came upon this people – a manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit was clearly expressed for all to see.

Our day here was full indeed. Many children; many patients; many teeth; many blessings... It seemed that everywhere I turned, there was a familiar face. The children here are exceptionally beautiful. The adults are precious. I seemed to know them all from past years – We truly came home to Sagrado.

VBS was packed with children and adults. Medical and Glasses scarcely stopped for a breather all day. Dental ran continuously. I didn't help the pace a bit by doing eye surgery instead of teeth. It was a personal high though when William came in and performed his first procedure! I was in awe at the steadiness of his hands and the gentleness of his way with his patient. He will do well with whatever God leads him to do in this life, one day at a time. Thank You Lord for gifting me with my boys. They are a joy to watch as You develop them into the men You desire.

Pat and Steve were able to see patients from the past during the course of the day. It was amazing to hear them talk about those who most likely would not be here today had we not come in the yesterday. God truly has purpose when He calls us to go and minister. It is imperative that we listen, and then follow, when and where He leads. The greater picture of "why" is beautiful to look back on. It is always perfect. But, we have to be obedient and go in order to be a part of the picture...

I visited Winston's memorial grave this afternoon. It is in a beautiful spot overlooking the river, just where he had said he wanted to be laid to rest. He is resting in the Lord, indeed. He ran his race hard and fast. He is remembered by many all over this great Valley. He was a good brother to me and countless others...

The service was held in the church. Pretty good crowd. Cilene was sick at home but her husband, Paulo, was on hand to greet us. No decisions this evening but the spirit was sweet. We are now underway to Cucui. We will arrive some time in the night. We are all well. The pace is steady. God is overtly blessing in every imaginable way.

Sunday, June 10, 2007

Cucui greeted us with singing on the banks of the river! Practically the entire community came out as we were docking. It was heart warming.

First, we went and surveyed where we would be setting up the different work stations. Cucui has not changed a bit. The homes and facilities are still what they are – adequate for protection from the elements, not much more. It was here that we were given Shmango (a talking parrot) last year. He looked pitiful – hardly a feather on his body! Come to find out, he was just a baby. He grew to be full and beautiful over the ensuing months.

We saw about every type of illness, tooth, eye and energetic child today as we ministered! We love it here. The people are genuine and highly receptive to the Gospel message. This too was a place that we were not welcomed at all last year. The Catechist of the Catholic Church led the resistance only to fall by the grace of God in the end. Rusty baptized him this afternoon along with his wife, Maria de Lourdes! He, Joaquin, is the lay-pastor of the growing church here. Land has been secured and building materials are already on the lot to break ground in a couple of weeks. When God transforms a heart, it is amazing to just sit back and watch as He molds and shapes...

We all worked till dark-thirty. Rusty was able to speak to his congregation back home. I watched from the clinic as he stood with the phone on the banks of the river, in the rain. His congregation probably does not realize what a jewel they have in he and Pam. This couple is anointed and driven as few that I know in ministry today. True, selfless instruments for our Lord...

Construction closed in the house of an elderly gentleman. All teams work diligently to meet the needs placed before them. Post-op on the eye surgeries was successful. VBS was active and cheerful. Dental was split – one line for fillings and the other for extractions. The portable dental unit is performing FAR beyond anything we had imagined. We will use it every trip, as God provides the professionals!

The service was a blessing this evening. The house was packed. Many got up and shared their love and appreciation to God and the team for the ministries performed. Good end to a good day.

We are now cruising to parts unknown. Our next stop is new to us all. I look forward to whatever comes. We are all in good health and spirits. Everything is just the way it was meant to be.

Monday, June 11, 2007

Bom Jesus do Cucui sits on the point of a peninsula, in a sharp curve in the river. From the “dental clinic”, the view was panoramic. There has been a continuous breeze all day long.

The village itself has only eight meager structures. One of them is an abandoned catholic church – a sign of past religious activity. The rest are in not much better shape.

By 7:00 AM, boats, large and small, began to arrive from every direction carrying loads of people. The village came alive! Many, many people. Beautiful people.

About 10 this morning, an anxious man came from Sao Jose asking that one of our docs go to his wife and help her deliver her new baby. Her water had broken and the baby might be breach. Well, if the entire medical team had been able to fit in the secondary vessels, they would have ALL taken off to help! Birthing is an especially neat deal. There is nothing else quite like it. When it is the 7th or 8th child, we become more like observers or referees. But, it is fun just the same!

Steve won the toss and assembled a small team to go and check it out. They returned a few minutes later having made the determination that we should medivac the lady and her husband to the city of Maues. The AMOR/Dan Shipley was fueled, supplied and staffed and off they went. I thank God for providing our secondary vessels – we are able to quickly serve in situations such as this with speed and efficiency...

The day went quickly but was long indeed! All teams were finally finished and onboard by about 6:30 this evening. Construction roofed a new community center. VBS entertained and taught the largest group of children yet this trip. Dental and medical just quit when there was not enough light to work by. It was an incredible last day on location.

Many new friends were made here today. The teacher and his wife emptied out their two-room house so that dental could have a place to work. They also shared the Paca (a pig-like animal) they had killed on a hunt earlier in the day. Others brought oranges, avocados, tapioca, tangerines and Brazil nuts as gifts. They were generous with the first fruits of their labors. Everything given was given from their needs, not their excess – very humbling for me.

At the service this evening, the house was packed to overflowing! There were at least 200 people present – mostly adults. Little churches from far and wide sent representative members to share in the worship. Several community leaders got up and expressed their gratitude for the work well done by our team. A special treat for Kathy this evening – the new community center that the construction team roofed was officially named after her! A sweet gesture, indeed.

We are slowly cruising downstream right now. It is 10:30 PM. The team is down for the most part, resting in their hammocks. The secondary vessels are out with our mighty “gator hunters” for one last try for glory. I am tired. It is a good and welcomed feeling. Not weary at all – just tired.

Our time on location is over. We begin our trek home in the wee hour’s tomorrow morning. I am in awe of what God has done in these past days. Tomorrow will be a day of rest and reflection - A day to enjoy each other’s fellowship as we head for home...

Tuesday, June 12, 2007

We slept off the coast of Sagrado last night. The gator hunters caught a few 3-4 footers (nothing to write home to mama about) and everyone had fun.

The blockage that cost us two hours to cut through at the mouth of the Rio Lago Preto a week ago, took but 20 minutes to conquer on the way out! We were out on the Amazon with the AMOR/Teresa (Pr. Edno’s boat) alongside in short order.

We had a share time with Edno and his family while our crew fueled his vessel and loaded it with provisions. The visit with the family was warm and moving. He has had great difficulties this year. Among other things, he almost lost his oldest son to asthma attacks. He stood firm through it all and God continues to bless his ministry richly.

We said our goodbyes and were underway at 10:30 AM toward Manaus. ETA is set for 8:00 AM tomorrow morning. The Beatriz is running extremely well. Her staff and equipment are in good order. It will be a day of visiting, inventorying and, for me, just resting in as much silence as can be afforded me.

This adventure in the Lord has been rich. He has provided at every bend in the river and every question along the way. He has provided the team with near perfect health. He has won a good number of souls to Himself. The team has functioned as a whole. Lago Preto has been impacted eternally.

Once again I marvel at it all. I am humbled by His moving Spirit. I am privileged to be a small part of this beautiful ministry. Through it all, good and not so good, I rest in Him and know that that is all He wants of me – just rest in Him and obey one step at a time. Thank You Lord for the honor of serving you in such a small way...

From The Helm will continue on or about June 16th. We appreciate your continued prayers. Thank you for sharing in our ministry.