

About Me

Jamie

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I am 26 years old and just celebrated my one-year anniversary with my wonderful husband Cheslee. Our babies are our 2 dogs - Brinkley and Bubba. Brinkley is blind, he has juvenile cataracts and Bubba is 15 years old and my very best friend in the world. They are both so special and unique. I am a proud American but know this country can do more for more people and hope to change the perception others have of us through my service. I still consider myself a member of my childhood church First United Methodist of Campbellsville. The church and its people are so near and dear to my heart.

JOURNAL Mission Trip to Brazil

I have just returned from my first international mission trip serving the beautiful people of the interior villages of the Amazon Jungle in Brazil. While in Brazil, I kept a daily journal in which I would like to share with you my daily encounters, challenges, and blessings. God Bless!

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Friday, July 27th - Arrival in Miami

Leaving home wasn't as hard as the anticipation of it. I froze on the flight from Louisville to Atlanta and am waiting to get aboard my flight to Miami. It looks like the weather may cooperate after all.....AHHH.....on the beach at last. The flight from Atlanta to Miami was so much more interesting. I sat by a professor from Chile -- he taught me new words (I love learning new words in foreign languages!) -- like empanada, pisco sour and about the Mapuche Tribe of the hills of the Andes Mountains. He was the sweetest little man, he truly looked like a professor of literatura. Wool overcoat, a wild silvery beard, hat, and sparkling eyes. He carried a spanish romance novel. He gave me his card and I will email him after I return. A trip to Chile with Cheslee to see the professor and the Andes Mountains sounds good someday.

My hotel is not the Brown. The biggest roach I have ever seen was in my bathtub. Agh! After I explored around, I decided the place was just fine though. After all, I should go ahead and get used to big bugs, right? I am right by the pool and am RED after 3 hours in the Miami sun. It feels great and the ocean water felt great on my skin. The beach near the hotel has alot of sea-grass. I also think I saw a barracuda swim by me in the ocean.

I just got to dinner at a fabulous Cuban/Spanish place called Casa Cuancho at the corner

of Calle Ocho and 24th in Little Havana (recommended to me by my first cab driver from the airport who was from Haiti). I am immersed in a restaurant of Cubans right now alone drinking a mojito made with Splenda. Although I tried to brush up on my Spanish, I can only understand a little and speak even less. I am embarrassed for myself. Hearing the languages around me is like a beautiful symphony orchestra. My cab driver to the restaurant was from Chile as well. I think I have only heard 2 American-English speaking people since arriving in Miami.

I have on only concealer and mascara. I love not knowing a single person in this city. Not being judged- except for my stupidity for not speaking Spanish. Dad said my Nannie and Pa lived here in Miami during WWII in a hotel. I wish I could find that hotel but dad says it has been demolished. I feel Nannie and Pa's presence here though. I have had more cultural exposure in 1/2 day in Miami than 1 year in Lexington. We are so unfortunately insulated. I love this. I know I belong out in the world, exploring, learning, helping, loving the people of God's world. Kentucky is my home, but the world is mine to change. Next year I want to go to Africa and help HIV/AIDS children orphaned by the horrible disease. My sister wants to go to Israel in February -- maybe! Even though I am adventurous Israel seems very dangerous.

The lady at the table next to me looks like a Cuban version of John Travolta in the new movie/musical remake of Hairspray. I can't stop giggling about this revelation. I was a little upset and nervous earlier but now I am fully embracing the experience.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Saturday, July 28th

Today I ventured out to my swim with the dolphins experience. It was beautiful -- the animals were so friendly and majestic. I got to swim with the son of Flipper from the famous TV show I grew up watching in my dad's office when he was principal. I got some great pictures and met the nicest newlywed couple from Colombia who became my 'family' during the experience. People I meet and my family I think think its odd or I would get lonely travelling alone, but you learn so much more and others are drawn to you when you travel alone. My Miami Seaquarium family and I exchanged contact information and promised to keep in touch.

After the seaquarium I headed to South Beach, Miami for lunch, the beach, and shopping. I was attracted to a place along Ocean Drive which runs parallel to the ocean to eat by the exotic food display and the crabcakes. Shortly 3 college students from New York, but originally from Latin America, came by and invited me to sit with them. We spoke about art -- my love of Monets and French impressionism -- and I encouraged them to visit Giverny, France. They spoke of Gaudemont, a similar French Impressionist but unknown

to me. I will definitely check it out. They invited me to attend a wedding with them but I politely declined, hearing the voice of my dad telling me to be cautious and alert.

After my insightful lunch with new friends, I headed to the beautiful aquamarine waters of South Beach. I had never seen a beach so pristine and ocean water so clear - it was turquoise like a sparkling jewel. I sat in the water and watched little gray fish like those you see in expensive aquariums swim around me. Paying no attention to the world, I lay down directly in the sand like a bed and waited for the tide to rise and tickle my toes. I stowed my bag at the lifeguard stand just going on blind trust that everything (including my passport documents) would be there when I returned to get it from my frolic in the Atlantic.

Everything was in tact and I headed 12 blocks down to Lincoln Avenue, the famous shopping district of South Beach. By that time I was extremely hot and dehydrated and decided against better judgment to get a strawberry/banana fruit smoothie which was a blood sugar catastrophe. I ended up buying a yellow shirt which seemed to reflect the flamboyant almost tacky Miami culture and headed back to the hotel sick from sky high blood sugar and dehydration at 6:30. My cab driver (from Istanbul, Turkey) and I got into a discussion about US politics and he noted the hypocrisy that the US is all about women's rights yet we are still to have a woman as US President. He says even developing nation's have women Presidents but few women's rights. I was so happy to get back to roachville, ur, I mean my hotel.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Sunday, July 29th -- Meeting the Group

Today I check out of Land of the Great Roaches hotel and into a chain/American hotel with concierge service- yea! I am so spoiled, but my bags are so, so heavy. This morning before check out I headed to the pool only to be enticed by a group/herd (what's a group of iguanas called anyway?) of iguanas and in my limited vocab of Espanol managed to befriend the previously machete wielding grounds keeper and feed them. They were huge -- I studied their forms and faces and knew I was looking into the eyes of the ancestors of dinosaurs. I proudly wield scratches on my thumb and forefinger from the bite of a Miami iguana who evidently has quite the taste buds for old, cold pizza.

I arrived at the hotel to meet the other folks but found no one else had arrived yet. I have been very anxious all day. Going to the work out facility helped. I am just ready to meet the people and figure everything out.

The hotel here is much more clean and I took advantaged of the clean shower and tub and shaved my legs and soaked in the hot water. I blow dried my hair and curled it just for the

heck of it knowing I will not be able to the next 11 days. Nerves, nerves, nerves - trust in God and His plan I tell myself.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Monday, July 30th -- Travel to Brazil

Well, I finally got a roomie to the hotel about 15 minutes after midnight. I would have enjoyed the bed more at the hotel had I known that I would feel like I was going to swing overboard out into the Amazon to be eaten by a piranha or worse at any moment during my first night sleeping on the Amor Beatriz boat that would be our home.

The group I have joined from Missouri are wonderful and feel like family after even one day. Bootsie, the lady I had been in touch with from the beginning to join the group, has beautiful black and silver curly, short hair like my Nannie did. I hadn't thought about my Nannie's hair in a long time. Immediately Bootsie became a comforting force for me. We had a light storm on the Amazon this morning. The skyline was amazing. I got to call Mom and ask her about Patty last night. Boyd gave me my post messages this morning, yea! I volunteered to lead our first devotional this morning and hope God will work through me to say the right things.

We just had lunch and are dolphin watching -- PINK dolphins! We've seen a half dozen in half an hour! There are capa trees - they look like dead trees with red and white balloons hanging from the branches. They are fruits but on the inside are dried and filled with a downy, cotton like material that the Brazilians use to fill blankets, pillows, and life vests. We are filling balloons with candy and throwing them out into the water as we see children along the banks playing outside their little huts on stilts they call home. As soon as we throw them out, they get in their wooden canoes and row out to the middle of the river to get them.

I spent most of the morning learning about the medicines and what each is used for for our mission work to begin tomorrow. I will not only be greeting the people as I thought but diagnosing and treating them with medication. Its an intimidating task at hand. I am excited to get going helping the people.

The landscape is so indescribably beautiful -- green vines, trees, bushes interrupted by white egrets resting on their branches.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Wednesday, August 1st -- GETTING TO WORK

Ahhh!! Pink dolphins were frolicking, playing in pairs around our boat this morning. Beautiful! I slept much better last night. We weren't moving so my hammock wasn't

swinging so violently. I have bruises on my knee from the first night, banging against the side of the boat as we hit waves. I gave my testimony to the group last night at our first devotional, happy to have my emotions hidden by the darkness. We sang hymns in praise and our voices were beautiful instruments for the Lord. Two of the other group members have lost children too. It is comforting to know others who have overcome similar trials in life.

The food is great -- they are really taking care of us. This is a fantastic experience. Yesterday we docked in Boa Vista da Ramos, a town of approximately 8,000 people. Through my new friend from Peru, a translator named Marlio, we met a man whose wife had just suffered a stroke. I wanted to help her so badly so we talked to some people in the city and found her home. Marlio and I went back to the boat and brought her some multivitamins. I wish I could have helped her more. Their home consisted of what looked like 2 rooms and the poor beautiful Brazilian lady trembled from her sickness and struggled to get up. My heart hurts for these people. I saw a dog covered with fleas and deathly thin. I was convinced he was hours from death from starvation and it too broke my heart. I got a piece of chicken from the boat for that poor dog and it ate it with unmatched enthusiasm. I know it was in both instances such a small thing but I can't help but think that God would be pleased. Mother Theresa's book said that her service to the poor and outcast was easy because she knew Jesus Christ was in each of those she helped and by each small and humble deed she washed, treated, cared for, and loved Jesus Christ himself.

The dolphins are so close we can hear them breathing from their blowholes. I can't get over the pink dolphins. Wow. So many experiences today I don't know where to start. We went to our first village today -- the children are the most beautiful people you have ever seen. The women are exotic and beautiful with their dark olive smooth skin and brown eyes. The babies are gorgeous-- Boyd said kidnapping of Brazilian children for sale in the US is not unusual - with an infant child being sold for 50-75K dollars.

Our first little town (which, I would come to know would be like all the others), Sao Raimundo, was so primitive and dirty, smelling of urine. Dogs barely alive and roosters and chickens plentiful. Horses walk around with no fences, one was waist deep in the Amazon eating floating grass islands. Our big boat wasn't able to make it into the village so a local pastor brought his small boat to us to take us and our supplies into the village. It is winter and the dry season in the Amazon now. Still 95 degrees though with almost 100% humidity. The water drops almost 40 feet though during the dry season, making some places very hard to enter.

I guess I got a taste of Cheslee's life at work today. We had patient after patient. All of the Brazilian people possess a certain beauty and softness in their eyes. Except for one

patient today, about 25 years old. She seemed so spiritually dead and dull, an impenetrable hardness in her eyes. I sensed she had been the victim of rape. We gave out hundreds of children's vitamins and worm meds. Children and adults walk around barefoot all day with dog and horse and rooster feces. We went to their school which consisted of 2 rooms infested with wasps and a huge tarantula keeping watch over who entered and exited. Unfortunately that was our only bathroom facility.

We ended up setting our medical, optometry, and dental clinic up in an open air little pavilion, I surmised it was probably an 15x10 foot room. The sun was very hot on my back. On the floor was a dead baby bat, bat skeletons and bat guano were all over the floor. Soon a woman came out and swept the floor with a 'homemade' broom made of tree branches and leaves tied together by wild vines and grass.

It seems like there were pregnant or nursing women everywhere. Before dispensing medicine we had to ask if they were 'gravido' (portuguese for pregnant) or breast feeding to prevent any drug interactions. One young boy had what Lowell called a parrot-beak chest -- an abnormality of the growth of his sternum and ribs. I felt sure he would never be able to afford the surgery he would need to live as grows.

A smile and kind eyes really do transcend any language. The children flocked to us and we played portuguese hot potato and sang hymns to the people. The children sang a song they learned at our VBS. Seeing the people flock to us to get eyeglasses - to see for the first time in perhaps decades was very powerful. Seeing their smiles as they looked around and rediscovered the beauty of God's world touched my heart.

At the end of the day we had the 1 hour ride back to the Amor Beatriz from Sao Raimundo. I sat on the back of the little boat and was mezmorized by the Milky Way. Being on the equator, the Milky Way was directly ahead. I had never seen so many stars, millions of them sparkled like jewels in the navy sky. I felt like I was floating in the beautiful Milky Way. We got back to the Amor Beatriz and Donelison, one of the crew, had caught a 5 foot alligator by hand over the side of the john boat - I held it, it was incredible.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Thursday, August 2nd -- Sao Raimundo and Bacabal Villages

This morning we went back to Sao Raimundo and finished seeing all the patients we needed to see - 72 in all. I was sad to leave, knowing I will probably never know the destiny of each person I met or each sick child we treated. I started the day playing in the sand with the children. It was so hot. They were so sweet and eager to play, so very

curious about the 'blancos' the white people. I think my green eyes really throw them for a loop too.

Before leaving I got to call Cheslee from the only phone in Sao Raimundo located at the center of town just outside our med clinic. It was so wonderful to hear his voice. Priscilla, Boyd's niece, let me use her international calling card. I can't believe that old, dusty phone really was able to connect me to Cheslee in Ohio. I took a picture of the phone, he won't believe it!

We left and went to our second village after lunch, called Bacabal. It was a little cleaner. I know I exposed myself to worms but it is worth it. Diane and I went to a family's home-made of old weathered wood siding and a grass roof. I played with the four children. One of the boys put a DVD of music from Brazil in. I didn't know how to properly do a Brazilian dance so I did the twist - haha, much to the amusement of the family and boys. They sank back into their hammocks and howled with laughter at me. Eventually I got the salsa step down and the kids joined me and we smiled and laughed. There are very few times in my life where I have felt such sincere joy and genuine happiness in my heart and soul as dancing with those beautiful brown children. The mother of the household was blind in one eye and the youngest baby we had treated in Sao Raimundo yesterday had improved - so rewarding. The father was to be baptized in the river later that night.

Most of the people we treated had respiratory distress from all the dust and fungal infections on their skin.

I really enjoy the crew on the boat who help Boyd. I caught Raymond/Raimundo reading his Bible this morning before breakfast and it made me smile. Daniel, our translator from Manaus, is so great with the kids. Marlio gives me a hard time but is from Peru and helps me with my Spanish. He is also a 'methodista.' The sunset was so breathtaking once again. On the way back, I took the fast boat and it started raining on us. It was enchanting to be surrounded by God's perfect natural splendor and feel the refreshing raindrops on my face. I felt like my sins were literally being washed away.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Friday, August 3rd -- Village of Bacabal

I slept in the sick bay last night because the snoring outside by my hammock was so so loud. I was pretty tired today but sustained by the love I feel in my heart for these people and children. It was another very, very hot day. The heat and lack of good sleep has started to catch up with me. I saw a young man today - the father of the 4 young children I danced with yesterday -- who probably has Tuberculosis, he was coughing up blood, peeing blood and defacating blood. He was baptised in the river this afternoon and I pray

that God will heal him as He sees fit. His baby has pneumonia and I am concerned the dad may have TB and unknowingly given it to his child.

Our medical clinic in Bacabal was shared with some bats roosting in the aluminum ceiling and nestled in the grungy corners of the room. Again, bat guano dirtied the tables where we were to set up and we cleaned and disinfected the space.

Today I got to hold a blue macaw - native to this area -- well, hold on a branch. It was beautiful and exotic. I think it peed on me a little. A family in the village also had a spider monkey. It sat on my shoulder. I was fascinated and saddened at the same time because they have it tied to a tree by a rope around its torso.

God is so good. The people in this village were so open to hearing the word of the Lord. 4 people were baptized in the River in front of the entire community. Afterwards the children and I caught tadpoles in the mossy waters on the bank of the river. They loved and were so proud to show me the tadpoles they caught.

Afterwards, we had a church service in the community center, about 75 people attended. A woman from the city thanked our group for our work and her sincerity made tears well up in my eyes. A little piece of me remains at each village with the children and people who so kindly open their lives to us. They live richly -- not the Americans. I feel like Jesus is telling me to take time off to be a humanitarian loving His people and service Him through love and care for the poor and unhealthy. I have been praying for the Lord's will to be done in Cheslee's offers and selections for a job. I hope he feels God working in Him to make the right decision. I want to start our international adoption process as soon as I return and he has secured a position of the Lord's choosing.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Saturday, August 4th -- Village of Villa Manaus

I had a good talk with Boyd this morning and he told me to make plans but be open each day to God's ultimate plan. I pray each day and beyond I start each day open to whatever He chooses. Praise the Lord and His Love and beautiful, beautiful plan.

Today has been the hardest for me so far. I need the Lord to sustain my confidence and energy. I am so very hot, the heat and humidity are excruciating. The uncleanliness, bugs, sickness of the people and seeing children whose own mother will not care for them when I want them for my own is very very painful. Many of the children I have seen in the med clinic would be taken by social services in the US. Today I saw a 10 year old girl with a yeast infection, an 8 year old boy suffering from intestinal worms so badly he

vomited them out of his mouth. I saw a beautiful little girl born with a birth defect on her right hand so that there is no length to her fingers and they are all webbed together on her palm. The fingernails connected to her palm were dirty and infected with fungus. Another very young girl's mouth was literally rotting. Her front row of baby teeth had rotted black and brown to the root and she had a hole caused by bacterial fungus, fueled by her rotten teeth, on her tongue. Her mouth was so rotten after 3 months of this she could not eat.

The mother lied to me and Raymond (my translator) and Boyd finally coaxed out of her that she just didn't want to spend the money for the medicine her daughter clearly needed.

I would have taken that child home in an instant.

Again, we shared space for our clinic with tarantulas and biting ants. Kids did cartwheels and walked barefoot in the bat guano.

Sailing along the river today we saw Japein - black and yellow bellied birds, scarlett macaws, eagle hawks, maracana (1/2 parrot, 1/2 macaw) and so many other beautiful creatures. This land is truly a pristine reflection of the beautiful work of God's hand.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Sunday, August 5th -- Village of Sagrado

Today we entered the village of Sagrado. This is a village that no Christians had been allowed to enter until 3 years ago, due to the influence of the Roman Catholic church. We are at lunch now, resting until we go back to town for the rest of the day. The med clinic today was much cleaner and the village much smaller - only 7 houses. We saw 42 patients, 2 machete wounds and a stomach puncture wound, an impalement from a tree branch. I saw a man who had a huge dent in his head/skull from a tree falling on him. Vacation Bible School had 82 last night. On the way out for the afternoon a man in a canoe came up with watermelons and a wild hog he had caught. It was struggling and suffering and I vowed I would never again eat bacon. A person on the trip remarked that hogs/animals were made by God for our consumption. I don't think I agree.

I will really miss the translators and crew. They are such wonderful people. We have been tied up with a couple of ministers and their families for the past couple of days.

Last night's worship service was so beautiful and truly a heavenly blessing to be a part of.

We were in a little open air church in Sagrado with exposed brick and mortar. Come to find out it was paid for by a church in Louisville, Kentucky - Walnut Baptist Church. The two area pastors - Pastor Ronaldo and Pastor Edno preached - and Boyd translated. Pastor

Edno led us in such a heartfelt and passionate rendition of the Battle Hymn of the Republic. He sang the verses in portuguese then in unison, then in portuguese and our group in english, sang the chorus - "Gloria, gloria hallelujah, gloria, gloria hallelujah!" It

was so glorious indeed and another moment of joy that I will not soon forget. It was so glorious to have two groups of such very different people united together to praise and move closer to the Lord.

Boyd's brother, Winston, who died at 49 of heart failure, was buried behind the little church in Sagrado. His cross was so simple - made of untreated wood and placed singularly on a hill overlooking the Amazon. The simplicity of his cross was a metaphor to me of the simple life we need to lead to serve the Lord. To not be connected too much to our things but to do ALL things for Him. When I die, I would like to leave a legacy of service and love of the people as Winston did. A legacy of being a loving, caring Christian servant who simply wanted to evangelize through love and sharing of whatever I have to the people of the world who are so needy.

We sang to the crowd, overflowing out of the church, the song "Amazing Grace." It moved my heart and I felt so blessed to have the forgiveness of the Lord for all my sins. We also sang "Have a Little Talk With Jesus" and I have to think we shared it because I have been sharing the Little Barren Quartet music from my iPod with the other team members. Mom and Grannie will be happy to know that 25 years after Stanley's death his ministry through music is still touching lives and planting seeds.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Monday, August 6th -- SICK

I have had diarrhea for several days now and awoke this morning to a rash all over my body. I am kinda freaking out thinking I have a fungal infection from some of our patients or the start of an Amazonian disease since it the rash has come with diarrhea, sore throat, and tiredness. Boyd seems to think it is nothing to worry about. It has gradually gotten worse as the day has worn on.

Despite not feeling well this morning I was so excited to enter the village of Enseada. No Christian evangelicals EVER from any part of the world in the history of the village had been allowed to enter the village until today. This was their first encounter with Christians and the love of the Lord shining by His will through us. I felt an enormous weight of responsibility to make sure their first impression was a shining one for Christ. Enseada is a community of 13 houses; approximately 70 families. Hearing of our invitation to enter, the Roman Catholic Church sent two women as well to 'protect' the villagers from our work.

When we first set-up medical this morning, no one came. I was worried. After about 30 minutes though a flood of village folks arrived. It was our busiest day and we are out of many vital medications. A 5 year old came to us after she cut her thumb playing with a

machete 3 weeks ago. It was very infected and gangrene had set in. Hairs and dirt were embedded in the wound. The infection had already paralyzed the nerves in her thumb; she couldn't move it or feel anything. Her thumb was literally rotten with infection and bacteria and she had a fever. I can't imagine why her mother had not taken her to the doctor in Boa Vista for 3 weeks. The lack of care was truly criminally negligent in my opinion. I cleaned the wound as best I could, pulling out the hair and dirt with sanitized tweezers. I started to rub anti-bacterial, antibiotic ointment on the wound and all the skin and gangrene started sliding off. I felt if I continued it would slough off to the bone so I stopped and instructed her mother to take the girl immediately to the doctor in Boa Vista.

I feel 100% that she will have her thumb, at least, amputated. We gave her Tyloflex (children's tylenol for fever) and a strong Amoxicillin antibiotic for the very apparent infection.

Of all the things I had seen to that point, this bothered me the most. After treating the girl, I became very dizzy, lightheaded, and think I was very close to passing out. I got tunnel vision and I couldn't hear; it was as if someone had put earmuffs on my ears. I think it was a combination of dehydration from whatever was wreaking havoc on my intestines and skin and the true neglect.

Next we saw a 22 day old baby who had yet to open its eyes for the 1st time. It was gasping for air, never closing its mouth. It was tiny, so very small. Her eyes were swollen and crusted shut. Boyd said she could be blind; caused by the passing of the baby through the vaginal canal with an active venereal infection. I hope the baby is okay, but I saw death in its' face.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Tuesday, August 7th - Last Day of Work

I can't describe my emotions right now. I just saw a dead full-term baby, delivered missing half its' skull and skin peeled from its' chin. It was beautiful -- its perfect little nose and lips. The village people had placed it in a casket and surrounded it with flowers and placed it on a table under a canopy. All the town people had gathered outside the home where the mother laid inside bleeding with a retained placenta and the dead baby lay so preciously outside. Boyd and I got in the fast boat and raced to the little village, I don't even know where I was. I collected some Amoxicillin, alcohol, swabs, cleansing wipes, my blanket, and pillows for our trip, not knowing what we would find when we got there. I prayed all the way there we would find a healthy baby, but it was not to be. After we arrived the woman was laying in a hammock, wet from the blood and fluids of birth. Boyd talked to her and I guess 15 people and I surrounded her. I couldn't understand the frantic pleas and cries of the people but their eyes told me everything. I knelt down beside the woman (who I think was in her late 30s) and all I could do was

stroke her hair and give her water to rehydrate her body and pray. I was hoping with all I could hope that she saw the love of the Lord in my eyes and knows Him. I hope she knows the Lord is with her at this moment as she goes via AMOR boat to Boa Vista to the hospital for surgery. I pray that she knows that the Lord is holding her baby and my baby as well and they are sharing the same love two mothers shared for a few moments through just a loving touch and look. As we sat on the Amor Beatriz before she departed for Boa Vista with a victim of a 3-step snake bite, she pointed at my neck. She wanted my necklace. I unclasped it and put it around her neck. I don't know why she wanted it. Maybe it was pure vanity, but I would like to think she wanted a little memento of the Christian love shared between 2 women of different cultures, countries, languages. I hadn't worn jewelry even once since arriving in Brazil. I feel it was part of God's plan for me to put it on for her to have today.

Last night at the church service 32 lives were saved. What a miracle to witness. To have never been allowed to go to the village to have 32 people confess their sins and invite the Lord into their lives. We sang to them "Amazing Grace" and "Lord I Lift Your Name on High." After the service we embraced our new brothers and sisters in Christ in our arms.

I still have the rash, its all over my body, creeping down places you don't want a rash especially when you already have had diarrhea for 3 days. I itch all over. Boyd thinks it may be an allergic reaction to my malaria medication, I started on a course of prednisone at lunch today.

We are getting ready to give each of the Preacher's families suitcases of clothes/shoes, etc. I have given most of the clothing and things I brought. Pastor Edno's wife is about my size, so all my clothes and shoes are going to her. I am honored and blessed abundantly and am so happy to be able to do so.

This trip has reinforced for me that nothing in life is coincidence and that it is imperative I let God operate and trust only in His plan. As Stacy said, if their luggage had not been lost by Copa Airlines, we would not have saved enough VBS supplies for Enseada because of our want to give as much as we could; not out of neglect for Enseada just out of eagerness to give. The Lord delivered the 'lost' suitcases at 2AM Sunday morning.

Perhaps the suitcases are a metaphor for our individual spiritual journeys. It was no coincidence that our group was in Enseada today with the capacity to save the poor lady whose beloved baby had died and who could have become toxic with infection in a matter of hours OR that we had the ability to take the deadly snake bite victim to the hospital. I have no doubt God put us there to save their lives and he has great plans in store for those 2 individuals.

I have so much on my mind and heart. So much new information and images in my mind.

I know it will take some time for the full impact of things I have seen and done through this mission to soak in and affect me. I need time to process it and look forward to receiving God's word on what this trip means for my future walk with God and work for God. I pray that I will remember to not try too hard to make things happen but to be patient and follow my heart and spirit as told to me by Jesus. I know a big part of what I need to do is to witness to those around me and reflect God in my actions EVERY day, even in anger, hurt, frustration, or any other mood or emotion.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL -- Wednesday, August 8th - Start Journey Home

Even the tributaries of the Amazon are larger and wider than the Ohio River or any river I have seen in the US -- I think I read that 1/5 of all water in the world is in the Amazon.

That definitely seems the case. It is a beautiful morning -- we are sailing towards Manaus. It will take about 40 hours to sail from the interior of the Amazon to Manaus, we started yesterday. Then its 3 hours from Brazil to the country of Panama, 3 hours from there to Miami with a 6 hour layover then 1.5 hours to Atlanta and 1.5 hours to Louisville. Whew.

MISSION TRIP JOURNAL - Home At Last

Well, its Sunday, August 12th and I am home at last. It was wonderful to see Cheslee and my parents at the airport, although by my 50 some hour of travel accompanied by near constant stomach sickness and inability to eat or drink without it coming back out, I was nearly delusional. Having only spent hours at a time on land for two weeks, the ground seemed like it was still moving - boat, plane whatever even when I was on solid ground.

The past few days since I have been back have been odd, I haven't quite settled in to my 'normal' life yet. Previously very nervous about no phone communications, I found it to be quite wonderful and peaceful most of the time and am begrudgingly turning my cell phone and blackberry back on. Stepping in to what many may think of our townhouse as meager, I felt enveloped by unnecessary luxury and feel almost guilty when I think of my beloved Brazilians, especially the children. Plagued by cramps and the continued intestinal distress, I feel guilty taking Ibruprofen, knowing the 20 pills I was able to give the women there with the same problems will have to last them a year until our group goes back to the village.

In America, success = excess. I vow not to live my life like that any more. Keeping up with the Joneses fuels our frantic race to what we see as to the top but really is more like a race to the bottom. Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 says,

"Solomon soon found mirth and pleasure to be vanity. What does noisy, flashy mirth towards making a man happy? The manifold devices of men's hearts, to get satisfaction from the world, and their changing from one thing to another, are like the restlessness of a man in a fever. Perceiving it was folly to give himself to wine, he next tried the costly amusements of princes. The poor, when they read such a description, are ready to feel discontent. But the remedy against all such feelings is in the estimate of it all by the owner himself. All was vanity and vexation of spirit: and the same things would yield the same result to us, as to Solomon. Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. His wisdom remained with him; a strong understanding, with great human knowledge. But every earthly pleasure, when unconnected with better blessings, leaves the mind as eager and unsatisfied as before. Happiness arises not from the situation in which we are placed. It is only through Jesus Christ that final blessedness can be attained."

I agree with this passage. It is saying that self-fulfillment never comes from self-gratification. I pray that I can live in accordance with this verse and my life shall be lived for the gratification of the Lord and not my self. Truly after my journey to Brazil, I know that joy and peace in one's heart does come only from doing the work of the Lord.

I don't know where the Lord will lead me in the next few weeks/months/years as I reflect on this experience, but I know His plan will be beautiful. All Praise to the Lord, and may God Bless us all.