

Thursday Nov.2, 2006

We wake up ... more or less, and kick off the day with prayers and breakfast. We feel reasonably refreshed with only a few lingering cobwebs. Richar, Pedro, and Miriam are waiting to show us around the available boats. We travel via peke peke to check out the "Nenita 2" and "The Spirit of the Amazon". The "Spirit" is too touristy and too expensive. The "Nenita 2" should do... if it runs. It is a new boat and there remains some question as to whether it is ready or not. Jeff felt that we were supposed to stop looking; so we did.

It is time to shop for supplies. We follow Miriam to one of the local merchants to begin stocking up. He is naturally happy to see us come in and treats us to chilled fruit drinks while we wait. He also treated us to boxes of Clorets gum on the way out. I wonder if he is trying to tell us something.

After parting ways with Miriam and Pedro we head off to lunch with Richar. We had some of the best Chinese food I have ever eaten... yes I did say Chinese food. It does seem a strange selection for the amazon region. Surprisingly, there is a significant Chinese population in the city.

With lunch properly dealt with and a few more supplies in the bag it is time for a siesta. I don't know how Jeff keeps going. My eyes are hanging at half mast.

Why we don't have siesta's at home? I feel much better. It is time to explore the nearby market. We are greeted by the sites and sounds of Iquitos. It is a gritty, chaotic city, seemingly in perpetual motion. It must be the grace of God that prevents daily piles of twisted, mangled wreckage from littering every street in the city. It appears to me that the only controls that the 'mototaxi's" use are the gas and the horn. Nascar has nothing on these guys.

All of this death defying vehicle dodging makes a guy hungry. Dinner at Ari's was great. We definitely are not going to starve. After a bit more exploring it is time to pray. The time on our knees lifting praises and prayers for: wisdom, discernment, safety, peace, unity, and joy is the best. God is so good. We are excited to be here and enjoy some deep spiritual discussion for some time before I finally nod off.

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Friday Nov. 3, 2006

Following what has become our morning routine. We met with our Peruvian friends to continue shopping for supplies.

Shopping sure works up an appetite, but then for me so does breathing. Another lunch at Ari's is in order. We even celebrate a birthday (Miriam's 15 year old daughter Jessie) with cake all around. If I keep this up I'm going to need bigger clothes. All through the meal a group of street kids kept up a call for attention. They want to shine my battered hiking boots and Jeff's sandals. Angelo and his two older brothers followed us all the way back to our hotel. Somehow we even collected a taxi driver. We, along with our vertically challenged entourage, finally called a halt...I finally gave in. Several soles later my boots are still battered and scarred and Jeff's sandals are still sandals. Oh well, I feel good having done my part for the local economy.

More exploring is in order so we head out to travel some of the grittier areas of Iquitos. Along the way we encountered a particularly mangy dog. There are many strays wandering the streets, but this canine derelict made me feel in need of a shower just looking at him. What to do? I chose to ignore the poor thing. However, being the tender hearted slob that he is, Jeff has to at least speak some soothing words to the ragged beast. Wouldn't you know it; he followed us all over the place. Jeff now has a new nickname: The Dog Whisperer.

Following what should have been another hair raising taxi ride (we have cheated death so many times in the things that I am getting used to it.) we arrived at the Nanay harbor area. Somehow Jeff always manages to find the right guy to talk to. This time his name is Sandro and he has a couple of different boats we could use. Theoretically, he could get us to the San Francisco area in 4.5 Peruvian hours. Hmmm.

We gotta go! Jacob, David, and Christina are scheduled to arrive at precisely 5:50...ish. Back at the hotel we met a couple of young ladies visiting here from Switzerland and Germany (?). They are volunteering in the public schools in some capacity or other. I never did figure out what their purpose was. They were headed for the airport in the same van, so Monica and Jeff had time for an "I know more languages than you do contest".... No surprise, Jeff won.

Something must be wrong. Jake, David, and Christina arrived on time looking much fresher than I did. No time is wasted in piling into the van for the ride back to the Ambassador Hotel. Of course, everyone is hungry for Ari's and who am I to argue. After dinner we enjoyed a time of prayer together as an almost complete team. We are still waiting for our "spark plug".

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Saturday Nov. 4, 2006

Up and running at 06:30 – enjoyed a wonderfully blessed time of prayer – breakfast at 07:30 – met some folks from San Jose California who donated a package of festive pencils for the kids.

The rest of the team is raring to go and it is off to the “Chinese market” for more supplies. What a seething, teeming mass of humanity we have to plow through. I bought hammocks for myself and a couple for gifts. They look very comfortable. I can’t wait to try one out.

We survived the market and dropped off our stuff at the hotel. If you have never been here you can’t really appreciate the local flavor of a fairly mundane statement like; “let’s go to the zoo”. The “zoo” is located well out of town. In fact, you can only get there by boat. I suspect that this particular feature is to keep the inmates from escaping. The other thing that I noticed right away is that most of the facility is built up in the trees. A collection of cages is joined by a series of walkways; all constructed out of rough cut lumber. After being greeted by the sloth, posing for the obligatory photos holding the anaconda, and fending off the resident craft sales person; it is time to take our memories and go. Carol will be arriving soon!

The plan is to load up the Nenita 2 and head out tomorrow. Unfortunately, there is now a fly in the ointment. The festive looking Nenita has a mechanical problem which will put her out of commission until at least Tuesday. Clearly, another boat will have to be found. Equally, clear is the fact that in our own power, we are out of options. I begin to worry; Jeff just yawns and reminds me that God is in control. How could I forget?

The rest of the group is still sagging from yesterdays travel. So Jeff and I head out to collect the last member of the team. After a bit of a delay due to weather, Carol’s flight finally arrived. Another sand blasting ride in a mototaxi and we are back at the Ambassador. The completed team rejoiced and prayed together for the first time.

Somehow dinner is more of an event than usual. We are all excited to be together at last. The place was short of tables so we joined ours with Mr. Louis’s to make room for everybody. Mr. Louis comes here to watch TV. He was a bit overwhelmed by the company for a while but soon warmed up to all of the crazy gringos who inundated his usual space. Never one to pass up an opportunity, Richar invited him to Church as we left. We have started trying to keep a running total on how many friends Carol makes this trip. She has been here for an hour and already the count is up to six that we know of. Time to call it a day; or is it?.....

Want to go look at a boat? This is a pretty silly question when directed at me; even if it is 10:30 at night.

After leaving the rest of us at the hotel Jeff and Richar had gone to visit a friend who may have access to a boat that we can use. The Lord is about to solve the boat problem in a totally unexpected way. It turns out that Jim Bower's former houseboat was donated to local missions after the tragedy that took most of his family. Richar's friend, Pastor Carlos, has the keys and has agreed to meet us at Nanay harbor to look at the boat tonight..... gulp! Time to mount up and go.

This place is intimidating during the day. At night, I find myself stealing frequent glances over my shoulder and checking my pockets. At the waterfront greetings are brief and somewhat subdued as we pile into a peke peke for the ride over to the houseboat.

The boat looks promising and we can feel that the Lord is at work. We live in anticipation of what he will do next! Some sticking points remained when we got back to the hotel. Suffice it to say that the Lord needs to speak with Carlos about allowing a goofy bunch of gringos that he has never met borrow the boat. So, we turn in not knowing for sure how things will play out but feeling confident anyway. Pastor Carlos and his wife have gone home to pray about it with a promise to call us by 7am to let us know. Thus the question (next page)

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Sunday Nov. 5, 2006

Well, is it Church or shopping? It is 6:48 am and Jeff just hung up the phone with a bleary eyed smile that tells me all I need to know. Why am I so surprised to see God work in this way?..

This is going to be a busy day. We scramble out the door to meet with Miriam. We still have supplies to purchase; perishables mostly, and preparations to make. The documents allowing us to leave will come together some how. We need to cram a full days preparation into about three hours....no problem. Like the Israelites pulling up stakes in Egypt, we leave in haste.

Praise the Lord! At 5:30 pm we are underway. Captain Omar informs us that we will continue into the evening to be within a short cruise of our first destination. The team gathered on the foredeck and enjoyed a glorious evening singing praises to our God and King as our crew steers us into a dazzling moon rise.

At around 10pm we had a wonderful time of worship and prayer. On our faces before the Lord is the perfect place to be. How his love and peace overflows our hearts! Thank you Father for ministering to us and guiding our steps.

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Monday Nov. 6, 2006

At 5:30am Omar is cranking up the engines. What a beautiful morning it is; my first on the Amazon. After splashing some water on my face and dragging a brush through my hair I blundered out on deck to greet the day.

Low clouds scud along seemingly just out of reach. One of them reaches down to touch the river; or is it growing out of it? Either way, we will push through it in a few minutes.

We spent a very pleasant morning cruising at a moderate pace. I can hear a strut bearing grinding itself into oblivion on the port engine. That might have something to do with the moderate pace. I worry about the possibility of burning out a shaft. Then I remember that God is in control and scratch that one off of my shrinking list of things to concern myself with.

We made a stop at the town of San Francisco to pick up some candy and another friend named Raul. Raul will accompany us to the next couple of villages and then we will drop him in Condor...I think.

It takes all of five minutes to fall in love with the people and their little town. They are both lovely, neat, and clean. I can feel the Lord's presence here. (I will be surprised throughout the trip how sensitive to the feelings of light and dark, good and evil, we are.) "The light" is evident in San Francisco Peru.

Miriam had a magnificent lunch waiting for us which we consumed with gusto. I think I could get used to this. Have you noticed what a prominent place food has in this story?.....

We continued on to the Rio Colchiquinas to visit another village called Santo Toribio De Mogrovejo. Say that five times fast. It is a lot of name for such a small village. Apparently, the Lord is not concerned about names or sizes. His message was delivered to the hearts that were prepared to receive it. Four adults and two children prayed to receive salvation. ¡A Dios Sea La Gloria! Indeed! The team did a great job. Jake spoke with power and conviction. Christina and Claudia were flawless with the "evangicube". David earnestly delivered his testimony and of course Jeff, Carol, Richar, and Pedro did their thing and made it fun for everybody. It was awesome to see God working through these wonderful friends.

While we would like to continue up the Rio Colchiquinas, the water is too low. Captain Omar and Alfredo make the call to turn back. I have to agree. It is getting a little tight to maneuver. We are moving on to a village called Condor.

A warm greeting awaited us at Condor and most of us were ready. Unfortunately, as we were leaving Santa Toribio Jake decided give “tumbling demonstration” that resulted in a badly turned ankle. Despite considerable pain he gamely hobbled to the top of the muddy bank to participate as long as he could. What a trooper. Our stop a Condor yielded fruit with 20 people accepting the Lord.

We are all winding down after the excitement of the day. Twenty-six people chose life today. We are so grateful to be witnesses to our Lord’s grace. A worship session ensued with everybody crammed onto the bridge singing, some of us at the top of our lungs.....Carol. If we were back home the cops would be banging on the door telling us to turn it down. It was great!

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Tuesday Nov 7, 2006

We got off to another 5:30am start again this morning. At least that is when Omar, Alfredo, and the diesels started. The rest of us are still trying to drag our carcasses out of bed.

Breakfast is amazing! I don't know what Miriam calls these things, but we have christened them "pancrapes".

We are enroute to the town of Paves to visit the believers there. Everyone finds their favorite spot to enjoy the morning. The weather continues to be beautiful. Although, it looks like it will be hot today.

As Richar and Jeff lead us through town we encountered several "dark" feeling places. There is a relatively large following of a cult known as "The Elitists" (sp?). The goons on their propaganda poster look absolutely demonic. Pray! Pray! Pray! They are evidently connected to some sort of Israelite Judeaizer cult of all things. Go figure.

We visited Casa de Loma for a while. It was really quite nice. It may be a bit primitive by U.S. standards, but very clean and appealing with a very nice view of the river. As we made our way back into town our paths crossed with one of the "elitist" women leading an old lady by the hand. The elderly lady appeared to be very ill. Her helper stopped us to ask for assistance which we were happy to provide. The incident was very unusual in that the "elitist" will rarely, if ever, acknowledge the presence of a gringo. It was a small inroad into this cult, but we will take whatever opportunities the Lord brings our way.

The plan to present the gospel at the school came together nicely. We were enthusiastically greeted by the teacher and the children. How refreshing not to worry about Church/state separation issues. Jeff and Carol started doing their thing and suddenly me and Jacob felt burdened to pray. I will have to backtrack a bit to explain why..... On the way to the school we noticed a pair of young ladies going from house to house. Jake and Jeff ID'd them as Jehovah's witnesses. To top it off, we were offered a drink of masato by a drunken local. He and his buddies were hanging out in a house across the way from the school. Masato is a vile "beverage" made from the root of the yucca plant. It is extremely potent and the locals use it to get slobbering drunk; in this case by 9:30 AM. Alcoholism is a major problem among these people..... So, Jake began to pray and I soon joined him. It was not long before we moved outside while Jeff and Richar went to straighten out the J.W.'s. We were in intense prayer for these two souls and the breaking down of the masato stronghold when a man walked up to ask to pray for his sobriety! His name is Armando. He is a believer with a problem and a sincere desire to walk strong in the faith. With the presentation in the school wrapped up, the rest of the team gathered round and joined in the fray. All the while Jeff and Richar were busily wielding God's word in the cult confrontation 30 yards down the path. It was awesome. On the way out we stopped to pray for a sick baby. His name is Franco and he is a cute kid. I hope to see him the next time.

I think it is safe to say that Carol has no restraint. The kids were playing Chinese jump rope; of course, she had to join in the fun. I could try to describe it, but you just have to see the video to really appreciate it.

After making use of the public phone we wandered over to Grippa's house. He is a famous artist who lives in Pevas. Naturally, his is the biggest house in town. He greeted us in the gallery with ice water all around. Good thing too, we were beginning to wilt. We enjoyed a tour of the gallery and the tower; both were fabulous. We reluctantly pulled ourselves away from the tower with its gorgeous views to make our way to Santa Lucia.

The worship service in Santa Lucia was a joy. You just can't help loving these folks. Cultural differences and language barriers evaporated as we worshiped together. Our Lord is among us and nothing else matters. When the service dismissed the shopping began. Everybody in town has made something that they are anxious to sell. We all made purchases (some of us more than others) and have to extricate ourselves while we still have a few soles left.

A refreshing swim and a short cruise later finds us back out on the Amazon. Our fearless crew found a place to stop for the night. Following yet another glorious time of worship with our Peruvian brothers and sisters it is time to hit the sack.

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Wednesday Nov. 8, 2006

Not much to report for today. We cruised all day to get to our next stop. Everyone passed the day reading, singing, studying, and/or working on the boat.

Between Miriam's cooking and the musical talents of our friends; we are increasingly spoiled.

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Thursday Nov. 9, 2006

Most of the team is hiking into a village called Central America. I stayed behind with the crew to work on the generator. I have a new term for “creatively maintained” equipment. This boat has been extensively “peruvianized”.....

The following is from David’s journal.

It was a 35 minute hike through the jungle to get to Central America....YeeHawww! (west Texan for “this rocks!”) Some of the local believers and a variety of kids were there to worship with us. A 32 year old man named Manuel accepted Jesus as his Lord and savior. We praised Jesus and made balloon animals for the kids. After an awesome time of prayer and distribution of candy to the kiddos it was time for a beautiful walk back to the boat. Abba Father! Blessed be the name of the Lord!

Praise God for a driving rain storm!

There really is nothing like watching the approach of an Amazonian thunder storm. As The El Camino charged (or staggered – depending on your perspective) along the storm was in hot pursuit. Dust swirled into the air as the vanguard of the storm blasted across a sand bar half-a-mile astern. A watery host was heard stampeding through the tree tops as several thousand gallons of rain crashed to earth. Goose bumps were raised in earnest as a blast of cool high altitude air was thrust downward by the approaching storm. For the first time in days, those of us crazy enough to stand in the rain on the aft deck, finally showered in clean water. Something that is hard to appreciate until you stare into a bucket of muddy “bath” water wondering –“what’s the point”?

Unfortunately, Jeff had to ruin a wonderful natural cleansing experience by blundering around the galley in a towel preparing dinner. Fortunately, he redeemed himself by making a couple of pretty decent pizzas.

After supper we enjoyed time singing praises of God’s glory in two languages. His presence was so thick around us it felt like being wrapped in a cloud. We have been granted such a wonderful sense of unity on this trip. Imagine, eleven people living together in a one bedroom – one bath – 350 square foot house.... and nobody has walked the plank.....yet.

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Friday Nov. 10, 2006

Time was running short so we had to forgo our plans for traveling farther up the Rio Napo. Instead we will visit a village called Urco Murano on the "Black Lake". The El Camino is bit too much boat to navigate the channel that leads to the lake. Fortunately, our Peruvian hosts were able to secure a peke peke to take us up the creek,.... so to speak.....

The lake isn't really black. The water is actually pretty clean and cool. Which is nice after several days of bathing in water that looks like it was scooped out of a particularly muddy pot hole. The Rio Amazon and its principal tributaries are loaded with so much silt and jungle growth; it is hard to believe that South America hasn't already been carved in half. But I digress.....

Urco Murano was home to Mr. Paul Paulson for many years. As a result, it has a somewhat "modernized" feel about it. Still no running water, or regular electrical service just a vague impression of westernization. About a hundred villagers greeted us at the central pavilion where we were asked to be seated at the head of the class. I don't know what I was doing there. The only time I was ever seated at the head of the class I had a dunce cap securely placed on my melon. Anyway, we had a very nice and well received presentation. Nine people prayed to receive Christ, all of them men. This was very encouraging and we joyfully cranked out a record number of balloon animals for the kiddos. I really think that if this whole missionary/private school principle thing doesn't work out for Jeff; he has a future as balloon "artist".

After all of that fun we decided it was time for a swim. Jeff and I swam out into the lake and turning to look back we noticed that all of the locals were lining the bank watching us. I was painfully aware that not one of them had followed us into the water. I turned to Jeff saying, I think that they are waiting to see which us goes under first. He just raised his eyebrows and said "you are probably right".

Well, I'm still writing so you have no doubt surmised that we were not consumed by some denizen of "The Black Lake". The team prayed for a *very* sick lady on the way back. We also picked up a few extra passengers who came to pick up whatever medicines we could provide; which consisted mostly of Tylenol. I wish we could do more but I'm not a doctor and I don't play one on TV.

Pressing on downstream we hurried to get to a town called Mangua Knowing that time is running out, we are hopeful of continuing the harvest. However, upon arrival we found that their long absent pastor had returned after a two year hiatus. I don't really understand why but he seemed to be lukewarm about having us come to their Church, so Jeff has decided to move on trusting in the Lord to lead us where He will. As always His plans are the best.

We were led to a town called Atun' Cocha which, roughly interpreted, means "tuna can" (this according to Omar who may have been pulling my leg).

To say that we were greeted with enthusiasm would be an understatement. The apparent village leader was a 70ish year old lady. She fairly skipped down the tall steep river bank, and waving her hands above head, joyfully danced up the gang plank and onto the foredeck. The rest of the village quickly followed her example and poured itself out in greeting. The spirit was especially at work in Atun' Cocha that day. Jacob and Richar both spoke with power and inspiration. David gave his testimony with moving affect and all of us fervently sang our King's praises. In the end fourteen adults were saved along with ten to twelve children. ¡A Dios Sea La Gloria! ¡A Dios Sea La Gloria! Jacob described this stop the best; calling it our "Macedonian call".

We continued our cruise downstream hoping to strike the Amazon before nightfall. Unfortunately, we didn't make it. It seems like that phase of the day known a "sunset" is abbreviated here. It is like driving through a small Texas town; if you don't pay attention you will miss the whole thing.

Twilight found us picking our way out into the Amazon, maneuvering carefully around large chunks of Amazon rain forest floating down stream. The best part, as Jake would so gleefully point out was the heat and the bugs.....

Have you ever tried to sleep in a sauna with bugs crawling over every inch of exposed skin? It is a real character builder. You should try it some time. The rains stirred up a blizzard of moths. Sitting on the foredeck with Omar as he worked the spot light, it looked just like a driving snow storm. This would be nothing more than an interesting occurrence among many others except for two very important developments. Our generator quit and the screens were improperly installed when the boat was built. This left our intrepid missionaries with a couple of options: 1) Keep the windows closed and sweat like Clint May at summer camp.... or 2) Open the windows for ventilation and be swarmed like unsuspecting victims in a cheesy horror film.....

In the end we chose to keep the windows shut and were partially swarmed anyway. It worked out OK though. After a while delirium set in and between Jake's mad giggling outbursts of "heat and bugs, bugs and heat! What more could you ask for!!??" and scaring Carol out of her wits pretending to electrocute myself while repairing the fan I had a pretty good time. I even fell asleep at some point.....I think. Oh well, what can you say except ¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Saturday Nov. 11, 2006

At some point the realization set in that this is to be our last day on the river. It was with expectant and melancholy hearts that our cruise continued on to Iquitos. We occupied the time with packing our stuff and cleaning the boat.

Arrival at Nanay harbor brought the unexpected and abrupt boarding of Brother Carlos. Apparently, he had been anxiously awaiting the return of his boat... oh, and us too. Bidding a fond farewell to our friends and the good ol' El Camino we loaded our gear onto the peke peke's and made the transfer to moto-taxis with minimal fuss. It is amazing how much junk you can pile onto/into a three wheeled motorcycle. After another gritty ride we found ourselves back at the Ambassador Hotel with a peculiar feeling of disorientation. After a week on the relative quiet of the Amazon; the swirling kaleidoscope of Iquitos takes some getting used to.

After a wonderful shower I plopped onto my bunk to read while working up a gloriously bone numbing chill by running the air-conditioner full blast. That sucker works pretty good!

Omar turned up that evening to present Jeff with a very unusual and exotic gift; the complete chest hide of a rather large alligator. How we are supposed to get this thing through customs we have no idea, but the magnitude of the gift is not lost on either of us. Obviously, we have begun a deep and lasting friendship with Brother Omar. He truly is a godly man and a good friend.

We all enjoyed one last dinner at our favorite restaurant joined by most of our Peruvian brothers and sisters. Fares and Richar provided the floor show while the rest of us savored our Cream El hadas. After a few "loose ends" pertaining to the boat were secured we prayed together and called it a night.

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Sunday Nov. 12, 2006

Time to go.....

I don't think I like this part. After breakfast, the team hauled all of the bags, spears, blow guns, odds, and ends downstairs to be loaded onto and into the waiting van.

The trip to the airport proved once again that Carol has absolutely no restraint. With her head hanging out the window like my old Labrador retriever; she greets every fortunate soul who dares to make eye contact. I was glad of the distraction. Our emotions are a muddled mess of urgent desires to get home mixed with the angst of parting with friends for time unknown.

Omar, Richar, and Claudia are at the airport to see us off. After tearful prayerful farewells we file onto the Lima bound jet.

Even with heavy hearts we say - ¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

In Lima we dropped off our stuff at the guest house and headed out to do some exploring and shopping. The markets in Lima are colorful and loaded with bargains. I bought some jewelry for my sweet wife. Looking at my fellow team members I could see that I was not the only feeling home sick; Jake looked positively green around the gills.

We enjoyed about an hour watching the Pacific Ocean trying to pound South America into gravel. From the looks of the beach I'd say it has a pretty good start. There is something hypnotic about the waves marching in endless succession; traveling hundreds, maybe thousands of miles only to hurl themselves in a futile explosion against the rocks of Peru..... If there is a lesson in it all, my feeble mind can't find it.

Of course a stop in Lima is not complete without enjoying dinner at "Beer Chicken". I don't know what the significance of the name may be. After tasting my entree I didn't really care. Dinner was quite good.

"Grueling" – That one word pretty well sums up the flights home. Through it all we remain a team. I am confident that this trip will bind us together in ways that nothing else could. I love you guys.

As always..... ¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!