

Thursday January 4th and Friday January 5th

The team assembled in the Church parking lot at 1pm. After a few final preparations we joined hands and prayed for safe travel, wisdom/discernment, and healing. Several of us were feeling a bit under the weather. We were also getting under way without resolution of the team finances..... I.E. we had none. Due to a series of miscommunications we failed to get the team money transferred to the bank in Iquitos as originally planned. The revised plan called for us to meet up with a fast running Mike Holton on the fly... so to speak.... as we made our way to the airport. We will be carrying the team money with us in cash..... I can't tell you how much that thrills me.

The link up with Mike went as planned; as did the flight through Houston. Unfortunately, the flight from Miami to Lima was delayed for two hours, arriving in Lima at around 7:30am local time. We cleared customs without a hitch and found the guy holding the "Wedgewood" sign. Our weary band of travelers followed Orlando (our driver) out of the terminal and into the gritty, pollution laden air of Lima's airport. A layer of diesel soot began to build up on our eyeballs. This was followed quickly by an enveloping fog bank of ode de' land-fill mixed with the unmistakable odor of questionable personal hygiene.... who's?? I could not say for sure finding it impossible to rule out my own.

After a refreshing shower and a little rest things are looking up.

Following a spattering of "what if" e-mails; the team prayed together and exchanged our worn US greenbacks for Peruvian soles. I was sweating this transaction because as a general rule, they will not exchange bills that are anything but crisp, pristine, and perfect (preferably new).

Evidently, counterfeiting continues to be a major industry unto itself. Imagine how our poor Peruvian teller felt when I handed her several thousand dollars in \$100.00 denominations; all of it worn and/or torn. I can only attribute the successful transaction to God's grace.

We enjoyed a traditional Peruvian lunch at McDonald's (of all places...(followed by coffee at Starbuck's (naturally...) and high tailed it back to the airport.

Jeff greeted us at the Iquitos airport with his usual silly grin. It was great to finally be together as a completed team. After dumping our stuff at the grandiosely named Ambassador Hotel (grandiose being such a relative term...) we set out for our "traditional" first team dinner. After dinner and a brief tour of Iquitos, my 3rd wind fluttered into more of a gasp. After prayer time, I faded away to the sound of the air conditioner singing its blessed song of refrigeration..... aaahhh.....

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria! Thank you Lord! for bringing us safely and brushing aside every obstacle.

Saturday January 6th, 2007

6:07 am..... The phone rings in accompaniment with Jordan's alarm clock.... which went off at 6:00 am. I have been sitting here for the last seven minutes watching my young room mate in amazement. The phrase "sound sleeper" is grossly inadequate to describe what I am witnessing. "Self induced coma" is closer to the truth. With a chuckle I finally answered the phone with a bumbling attempted greeting in Spanish. The practical joker in me is giddy with excitement, considering all of the possibilities. However, I managed to scrape together a small helping of self restraint, settling instead for a slap of Jordan's foot on my way to the shower. Besides, I'm still too tired to move him to the roof; ... maybe tomorrow.

Breakfast in Peru is a marginal meal carried off primarily for the benefit of visiting Gringos. Thank the Lord for Folger's single packs. For those of us with a coffee affliction, Nescafe instant is a pitiable substitute. I hope I brought enough Folger's. I need two cups just to prime the pump.

By 7:30 we have all guzzled our drinks of choice, choked down a selection of bread and.... more bread and are on our way the "Chinese market".

I want you to close your eyes and imagine the Texas State Fair on opening day.....now squeeze the whole sticky mess into the "Cotton Bowl".... oh, and throw in lots of raw meat, fruits, and vegetables remembering all the while that everyone is a foot shorter than you are you there?.... Can you smell it?.... Good! Let's go find a hammock and food for 13 people for as many days.

Shopping in Peru frequently results in sensory overload. There is such a vast array of sights, sounds, smells, and people; all of them buying and/or selling anything and everything you could ever think of plus quite a few that you undoubtedly never have;.... A snake's head in a jar or maybe just a cat... to go.

We had lunch at Ari's (I love that place) with some of our Peruvian friends, followed by a brief (very brief.....) siesta. Omar agreed to take us to the zoo. Accordingly, four of us met in the lobby for another Peruvian adventure.

It is a "zoo" in the sense that it has animals contained in such a way that visitors can see and interact with the critters. Other than that, it is not like any other zoo you have ever seen. After a sandblasting ride via moto-taxi to Puerto Nanay followed by a peke peke ride up a creek. We arrived at our destination. We were greeted by a pair of three toed sloths. The smaller of the two is named Maria. I can't remember the larger one's name so we'll just call him Jeff. Jordan and Clare had fun playing with the sloths. In fact Maria became quite attached to Clare.....literally. She looked like a profoundly ugly baby stuffed in a papoose. I think that Clare set a record for holding the most critters at one time. We have photographic evidence which shows her holding three large parrots and Maria the sloth all at the same time. Way to go Clare!

Of course, we all had to get our pictures taken holding the resident Anaconda. His name is Big Sid...not really I just made it up, but I think it would be a good anaconda name. Holding Big Sid is an interesting experience. The actual hoisting of the snake was preceded by dragging him against his will from a nice smelly mud hole. Jordan felt much better after he (the snake) was dunked in the river to wash off some of the scum. When the handler brought

Big Sid over a couple things were very apparent. First, of course, is that Big Sid lives up to his name. He has to be every bit of twelve feet long and weighs about fifty pounds. Unfortunately, Big Sid also smells like a well seasoned sewer pipe.

The rest of the zoo is elevated on stilts. The whole arrangement reminds me of a large sprawling tree house. There are a few critters yet to see, but by far the most entertaining are the monkeys. Jordan seems to have a knack for communicating with them. They soon picked him out as the most likely target and started working him over for a hand out. They must have sensed my less than enthusiastic vibes. Any animal that is known for hurling its own..... well, you know. Anyway, I'll let Jordan handle all of the "monkey whispering".

Following the adventure at the zoo, we made our way back to Omar's house to drop off his boat. I was glad for this little diversion as it gave us a chance to meet Omar's family. They are delightful. Though I never did get a smile out of Mateo; who is Omar's youngest at three. A good time was had by all and we made our way back to the hotel.

Jeff led our merry band out on the town at around 7pm. There is a neat pizza place just off the plaza and around the corner from Ari's. I was pleasantly surprised at the delicious pizza. The frozen lemon/limeade was especially good. Our Lord is always working and this night was no different. Our paths intersected with a local missionary couple. The Lord called Jerry and Tony Adams from a northern European mission field to the Amazon River basin about eight years ago. Talk about culture and climactic shock.

We visited with Jerry and Tony for several hours; reluctantly parting company around 11:30. It was a great day.

As always ... ¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Sunday January 7th, 2007

It was another 6 am comatose start this morning. Once again I was able to restrain myself and Jordan did not wake up in some obscure location. We were supposed get an early start, but our Peruvian friends are running late. Therefore, we decided to have breakfast and watch Jeff run in circles.

The delay gave me time to hustle over to the internet cafe. I still haven't sent the update for the website. The rest of the team left for the boat while I was away. Jeff came to retrieve me at around 8:30 and we made a run for the boat. The lines were cast off as we leapt aboard. We rejoiced at being under way at last.

The rest of the day and evening were spent cruising down stream toward our first stop. We enjoyed our first dinner and devotional afloat. After hanging the mosquito nets and tying up our hammocks we are ready to turn in. Personally, I have not spent the night in a hammock in over twenty years. This should be interesting.

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Monday January 8th, 2007

Ahh yes,... The familiar sound of a marine diesel crashing and banging to life at 5 am. We roll out of our hammocks to start the day. We first had to convert our sleeping quarters/common area/dining area into its dining area function. Hammocks are taken down and stowed, and the dining table is brought back in from the aft deck.

Following a breakfast of wantons and bread; we continued cruising to our first stop. Enroute, we had a wonderful devotional and worship time. Our destination and purpose are still obscured. The word that we have received from the Lord was that we are to be “led as blind men”.

We arrived at San Francisco at around 9 am. We stayed long enough to visit the local pastor’s house and pick up candy and of course play with the kids. We then continued on to the Rio Cochaquinas.

As we approached the mouth of the Rio Cochaquinas Jeff called us together to pray for guidance. The Lord told us to sit on the front of the boat and watch for the signs that he would give us. The cruise to Santa Torivio took a couple of hours. We made our approach and prepared to go ashore. However, Jeff felt strongly that this was not where we were supposed to be and Shauna was feeling the same. Therefore, we visited only for a few minutes before re-boarding and pausing a moment to compare notes.

A sort of huddle quickly formed on the bow of the boat as Shauna related a dream that her friend Gayla Martin had about this trip. As she did this one of our Peruvian brothers (Jilbe) was relating his own dream. To our astonishment both dreams were very much the same (keeping in mind that Shauna’s Spanish vocabulary consists of her favorite Tex-Mex dishes while Jilbe’s English is in a similar state of non-existence) Everyone started to experience that old goose bumps on the scalp sensation as Jeff interpreted Spanish to English and vice versa. There were several elements or signs in the dreams which proved to be very significant.

In the end, the Lord told us to sit up front and watch for a pair of white birds which would lead us to our destination....??? white birds?? What is that all about??.....

If the Lord tells you to watch for pink elephants, save yourself some trouble. Don’t stand around wracking your brains and questioning him. Just pipe down, sit down, and watch. You can bet that pink elephant “land mines” will be your next concern. Fortunately, we did not have to watch for anything so strange.

Our white birds showed up about 20 minutes upstream from Santa Torivio. They were tiny, with a wing span no bigger than the width of my hand. They were also incredibly white. I realize that there are a gazillion shades of white. These birds where at the dazzling, pristine end of the white spectrum. Only two of them put in an appearance as they took turns leap frogging ahead of us. Always zooming forward as the Nenita would draw alongside. We continued in this fashion for a couple of hours. The same pair of birds kept up their leap frog pattern during this entire leg of the trip. At some point they began a new pattern of flight. They began to zigzag in front of the boat; crossing paths in a very rhythmic and consistent 30

to 40 feet. When the village of Quebrada Huitoto came into view, our birds disappeared. We never saw them again.

With a sign like that pointing the way we didn't need a kick in the pants. We were ready to go! Unfortunately, our target audience was not feeling very receptive to a "gringo invasion". It seems that the local drug lords, in conjunction with the resident warlock (just what every town needs) have the population convinced that gringos only show up to steal the faces off of their children and other equally outlandish charges. Outlandish or not, the locals are afraid of us and won't come out to play.

After a good deal of head scratching it was decided to move upstream to see what else we can find. We maneuvered around several bends in the river with furrowed brows, knowing with absolute certainty that Quebrada Huitoto was the right place. It did not take long to decide to turn back; but what to do?? If the villagers are afraid of gringos, why not send in the Peruvians? With plan "B" in hand, Jeff had Captain Juanito tie up close to a house perched on a high bank while we sent in the scouts. Richar, Pedro, and Omar boarded the "dinghy" for the trip back to the village while the rest of us prayed and tried to catch glimpses of the resident Fidel Castro look-a-like.

While we played "hide the gringos" our Peruvian contingent sought out the villagers back at Quebrada Huitoto. Following the prompting of the dreams to "go over the hill" our intrepid Peruvians located an entire network of villages hidden in the jungle. They successfully made contact with the locals and four salvations soon followed. With the door opened we now know that this trip is just the opening foray into this part of the basin. We are excited to have a foot in the door and plans are already in development to shine the light into every nook and cranny.

We left Quebrada Huitoto late in the afternoon and headed downstream to the Amazon; our next destination being Pevas. As evening closed in, Pedro became very ill. The concern-o-meter moved into the red zone when Pedro passed out landing limply in my arms. It took considerable reassurances by Jeff to calm Miriam and Liz down. They thought that he was dead. Jeff and I just figured he was happier unconscious than he had been five minutes before. After all, nobody enjoys turning themselves inside out. We moved everybody to the upper deck for the night to try and minimize the potential for spreading the Pedro-itis.

Capt. Juanito drove the Nenita hard late into the night trying to reach Pevas ASAP.

Fortunately, the new day would find the concern-o-meter back in the green. A good nights sleep and five thousand disinfectant wipes later found Pedro up and around and praise God no other sickos.

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Thursday January 11th, 2007

I can't help but comment on the engine in this thing. It sounds like a metal trash can full of scrap metal being rolled down a steep hill. Maybe it just sounds worse at 4:30 in the morning. As annoying as it is on the upper deck where we slept, it must be positively deafening for our Peruvian friends on the lower deck.

After quiet time the deck was reconfigured into dining mode and breakfast was served.

We continued steaming along at a blistering 4-6 mph as measured by the GPS. Oh well, it gave us time to catch a welcome nap.

We pulled alongside the dock at Mazan around noon. Most of us could not pass up a chance to phone home and all piled ashore like a bunch of ...well, gringos. It is difficult to communicate much within a 1-3 minute window. At least our loved ones know that we aren't dead yet. A few supplies were secured, the captain's paperwork was reviewed, and then we continued our journey. Our next stop, Santa Cruz! I had never been there but Jeff, Shauna and Bethany had ministered there last year and were eager to return.

Upon arrival at Santa Cruz Jordan gave a demonstration of what it means to have a servant's heart. The pavilion at the center of town was full of trash and dirt. Jordan went right to work cleaning it. I told him later that I am sure the people will remember his act of service long after we are gone. I think that the people were surprised that a gringo would show up to serve them.

Most of the adults were away working; so we ministered to the kids. They were delightful to be with and were very receptive to the gospel.

Omar is great with the kids and they really enjoyed singing the songs with him. Time fly's when you are having fun and quicker than you could say "my but those kids are cute", it was time to go.

Our next stop was a village called 1st of January...in Spanish of course. However, there was hardly anyone there. So, after a game of "futbol" we loaded up and continued up the Mazan River.

We were told that there is another village further up the river. By the way, The Mazan River is beautiful; with much thicker more lush jungle and cleaner water than either the Napo or the Amazon. Unfortunately, further upstream it is also populated by the drug lords who don't necessarily agree with the need for evangelism. We traveled upstream until dark and then tied up for the night.

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!

Friday January 12th, 2007

We awoke Friday morning to a gentle rain. Unfortunately, we couldn't hear it over the cacophony emanating from the engine bay.

We were hoping and praying that we could find the village that we have been searching for. Shortly after breakfast we reached a fork in the river. It was decided to send the small boat to scout things out rather than try to maneuver the Nenita into an unexplored narrow stream. Our bold Peruvian team members piled into the boat and ventured forth while the rest of us waited and prayed.

A thorough exploration up both streams proved to be fruitless. No villages were sighted and time was running out. It was with a deep sense of disappointment that we headed back down stream. For a moment we were forgetting that God is in control, and boy are we glad that he is. As always, God's timing is perfect. At around 9:00 the rain stopped and the sun came out. As we approached what turned out to be the "third zone" of Santa Cruz, the entire population of the village was gathered at the central pavilion for a town meeting. The speaker must have been a snoozer because they were all on their feet waving at us to stop. Needless to say, Bethany was about to bust with excitement as she relayed the news to Jeff.

Capt. Juanita brought the Nenita about and took us back for a visit. Upon arrival Bethany noticed that the speaker at the town meeting was the mayor of Santa Cruz; a man that they had witnessed to last year in a different town. What are the chances?? This was his second time to hear the gospel. We can't help but wonder what the Lord has planned for his life.

Once again Richar preached the gospel, and Omar led us in worship. The Holy Spirit had prepared hearts and a number of people were added to the kingdom. Aladino, Bethany, Jordan, Clare, Claudia and Jilbe went to work ministering to folks, updating records and distributing discipleship material while Jeff, Shauna and Richar went upstairs to pray for an injured man.

The harvest was exciting, but the Lord wasn't finished here yet. One of the ladies asked us to pray for her husband who had also been injured in a logging accident. We accordingly slogged our way through the mud to their casa. We found the man sitting on the floor behind a screen mending a net. He appeared to be in pain and was obviously paralyzed from the waste down with his wasted legs splayed out before him. The Holy Spirit filled the room and tears filled my eyes as we began to pray. The Lord has been working on this man's heart. Although, we didn't witness his physical healing I won't be surprised to find him a walking witness the next time we come this way. With our hearts still glowing we wrapped things up and headed back to the boat. God is so good.

Feeling a sense of "mission accomplished" we turned our hearts (and the boat) toward home.

We stopped again in Mazan on the way out of the Napo to make phone calls and pick up a few things. While we waited a funeral procession passed down the main "street". As you might expect, the hearse was a moto-taxi.

We were beginning to get antsy for home. So after some abbreviated phone calls washed down with a Coke and a smile

we headed back to the painfully slow Nenita.... Did I mention that she is slow?..... Not “slow” as in dim witted, but “slow” as in, I can crawl faster backward through an 18 inch drain pipe full of jello.... I.E. *not fast*. As we approached the mouth of the Napo, we encountered a nice refreshing rain squall and our first opportunity to shower in water devoid of suspended dirt and/or bugs. We thoroughly enjoyed the experience even though the wind was blowing the water horizontally with considerable force. It felt like we were being pelted with BB’s thrown by a major league pitcher. We finally chickened out and retreated to aft deck to get out of the wind.

We reached the Amazon and found a place to belly up for the night. We had a great devotional time, perhaps the best so far. You could tell that we had thoroughly bonded as a team; the only barrier between us being the curse of Babel.

Somehow, we have learned to communicate anyway.

Hammocks were strung up and the “psychological netting” was let down for the last time. With that realization alternately weighing on and buoying our hearts, we turned in for the night.

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria

Saturday January 13th, 2007 through Monday January 15th, 2007

The usual sounds of mechanical distress signaled the beginning of our last day aboard the Nenita. It dawned cloudy and relatively cool, which felt great to me as the “tan” I cultivated yesterday was radiating a message to my wife. I thought Jeff was going to fall off the boat laughing before he could snap a picture.

Hammocks and psycho-netting were folded and stowed as a breakfast of whatever was left in the cupboard was prepared for our dining pleasure. I’ll have to look it up when I get home, but I am pretty sure that the lowly chicken is the national bird of Peru. Chicken, it’s not just for breakfast anymore.

The rest of the day consisted of traveling, cleaning, packing and moving. By afternoon we were tied up at the dock in Iquitos. Surprisingly, we still have energy enough to venture to the market one more time followed by our last Ari’s burger.

That same evening we all met together for a farewell dinner. Richar, Omar, Aladino, and Jilbe all brought their families to enjoy Chinese food. It was a great time together. We finally tore ourselves away and headed back toward the hotel. Someone, I’ll not mention any names (Jeff) had to have ice-cream for dessert. Far be it from me to let a friend eat ice-cream alone. 11’ o’clock found us waddling off to bed with a 5am wake up call.

I will end this journal here. The rest of our adventure consisted of approximately 36 hours non-stop travel via ground and air transport with a brief interlude of dining and shopping in Lima. We arrived home, fried but happy for having been found worthy of serving.

It was a fantastic trip. After comparing notes, we find that 56 to 58 adults (depending on whose notes you look at) accepted the Lord as Savior and King. Perhaps of even more significance is the door that has been cracked open into the Cochaquinos area. We are praying earnestly that the Lord guide us in everything we say and do as we go forward.

It has been written and spoken many times already and I will close with the same.....

¡A Dios Sea La Gloria!