

Giftings from God come in many guises. We sometimes have to look hard to see them and at other times they are just overwhelming. What I have learned is that stepping out of one's comfort zone into the unknown will always have its rewards.

"I don't care to travel."

"I know, but Chad and I would like you to consider going on a mission trip to India with us," my daughter Robin responded.

"Well, I told Paula and Fred Boley that if I had time to travel I would visit them. They purchased 130 acres of land in Porto Velho, Brazil and are trying to build an Indian health center."

"Okay," Robin replied, "we'll all go to Brazil!"

Chad had a lot of frequent flyer miles accumulated from his travels as an Industrial engineer consultant and was hoping to get good accommodations with the miles. We hoped that the long flight would not be difficult. It was short notice though and forced us to take a less direct route out of our way East to Newark, New Jersey. From there, we would fly passed our destination, to Sao Paulo, which was many hours South and East of Porto Velho. The last leg would be to Manaus and then back to Porto Velho, Rondonia, Brazil. We emailed Brazil back and forth and thus, the preparations began.

I had my passport in preparation for the new millennium's uncertainty. You know what Maimie Brown's boy, Lester Brown always says, "It's better to be prepared and not have an opportunity than to have an opportunity and not be prepared." I was glad I was prepared.

I located a doctor that covered vaccinations for travel; Hepatitis A, Tetanus, and Typhoid. Some blood work was necessary. I carried Cipro just in case I contracted sickness. The doctor's office stamped my passport and gave me a prescription for Larium to ward off Malaria. I was ready.

Four of us would be traveling together; I was the only teacher, Robin, a retina surgeon, her husband Chad and Kevin who worked as a surgical technician for Robin. We packed for several days as Robin and Chad continued to purchase items until late the evening prior to departure; medications, tools, chainsaw, bench grinder and a circular saw. Paula's sister Barbara gathered donations of medications and I packed a lot of t-shirts, underwear and a staple gun and level.

We flew out of the Detroit Metro airport about 5 p.m. on March 16, 2000. The three-hour layover in Newark allowed us to stretch and eat Sushi before the next flight.

"Praise the Lord, extra legroom!" said Chad as we took our seats for the nine and ½ hours to Sao Paulo. Chad is 6 ½ feet tall and legroom is important to him. Empty seats on the flight were a blessing.

The Sao Paulo layover was 5 hours. A couple of Allerest tablets for me and a chance to again stretch out helped ease the rigors of travel. Todd, my oldest son, had been in Sao Paulo on business and he sent me 200 Reals (pronounced hay-ice), Brazilian dollars. We were able to pay our airport taxes with that. Chad thought it would be good

to get more Brazilian dollars and left to find a money machine. With his blond, 6 ½ foot stature, he attracted all the English-speaking people. Oriental as I am, I blend well into the huge oriental population in Brazil. Robin looks Brazilian, Kevin looked like a tourist. None of us knew any Brazilian Portuguese. I spent most of my time preparing to teach Trigonometry for a college in Michigan.

On board for the final leg of the flight, we reminded one another not to order ice in the drinks. Chad still got sick but it was more a case of his huge build requiring extra oxygen. The farther we got from Sao Paulo, the more jungle there was beneath us. Kevin motioned to the window twice. I looked out, “Rainbows!” The rainbows topped the cloud cover and dampened my desire to sketch out lessons on sine and cosine. There are some visions that reach right into your gut and no words suffice to convey what is felt. *Giftings from God.*

An hour late, the plane landed in a small airport in Porto Velho. We descended the stairs from the plane and walked to the terminal. The four of us had the same reaction – “It’s really hot and it’s unbelievably humid!” The entire luggage arrived safely through customs. Fred met us with his combe, a Volkswagen bus. We were able to load all 12 bags on board and still have room for us. The airport was on the far side of the city and so we drove through the city, the combe bouncing over the speed bumps. There was no air conditioning. A small fan hung from the ceiling. We kept opening the side windows for better ventilation – they kept closing.

“We’ve had some problems back at the main house so instead of Paula cooking, I am going to stop on the way,” Fred said. He stopped at China Norte Express and picked up some fast food. The many walls of the city were old and dirty looking. Portuguese writing was scribbled everywhere. It was a stark contrast to the beauty of the palm trees and other tropics. Nicer homes were evident here and there; homes with tile roofs and high brick walls topped with shards of glass. There were fewer of them than the many windowless shacks. *The soul grieves for such a loss of achievement of full potential.*

Fred stopped at the food mart. The combe died. The men discussed. Fred left. “Fred is going to see if he can find a local to push us and get the battery charged,” said Chad.

We waited. We waited some more. We didn’t feel like doing a lot of talking in the heat and humidity. A Brazilian man came out of a backroom with a flat basket. He tossed grain into the air. A few locals were chatting near the doorway of the food mart. Finally Fred returned with local reinforcements. Everyone pitched in to push the combe except those of us who were over fifty (Fred and I). Fred popped the clutch and the Combe started instantly.

The acreage was 18 km out of the city. The farther we went, the bumpier the roads; and honey, they weren’t speed bumps! It was the end of the rainy season and the red cascalha roads regularly developed huge erosion potholes. The combe hit a pocket and then splashed its way through. Fred had washed his car as part of his welcome. His magnanimous gesture went unnoticed. It took more than a little skill to maneuver the combe. We lurched from side to side, and up and down until we reached a chained wooden gate.

Three beautifully conical jambu trees stood sentinel. One of the trees was punctuated with large tubular yellow flowers. The flowers were growing from a thick, one-inch vine that found its way to the top. Behind the gate, there was bare red cascalha

soil. *Where was the few inches of tropical rain forest debris that should cover the land?* A black and tan female dog with three pups lazed about the barren ground. Still the grounds were trying to support young palms and other young tropicals, though some were dying. Paula waved to us from the porch. Two dogs with her began to bark.

“Don’t touch the dogs,” she yelled as she pointed to the bitch with her pups. “They’re strays and you don’t know what you might catch – mange and whatever else.” A second scan of distant boundaries took in a grazing horse, hibiscus and caladiums as well as other tropicals.

“That’s a stray,” said Paula in reference to the horse. “I don’t usually have the dogs on the porch but something attacked a dog last night and upset Hecky and Spice. Didn’t it Spicer,” said Paula.

What here would attack a dog?

Spice was a mixed Fila Brasileiro that had the head of a German shepherd and the body of a Great Dane. Hecky was a small dog, much like many of the strays that roamed that area.

Paula filled us in on the dogs:

“The Fila is from the German missionaries in town. These two dogs used to fight all the time. One day Fred decided to take Hecky and drop him off 20 miles away. Twenty miles! Seven days later, Hecky was back; but he never argued with spice again. They have been just fine ever since then.”

The guesthouse we stayed in was more than any of us expected. We thought we would be camping out. There was an indoor toilet with a cold shower, very cold. The floor was laid with beautiful green ceramic tile throughout the house. It seemed like such a contrast to the seemingly cabin construction of the actual building. One of the windows had green fabric screening but the others were shuttered down. Three bedrooms met our needs. Kevin had his own, I had mine and Robin and Chad had theirs. The walls were wood, sealed and painted. It was good that it was already dark or I might have been concerned about a few spaces between the wood boards.

“The mothballs around the edge of the rooms help keep things out. You know, like bats,” said Paula teasing.

“We’re eating here,” said Fred, “because a load of cascalha was delivered and they just piled it up in the road to the main house making the road impassable.”

We prayed and ate and discussed some of the things that had been brought from the States. Fred showed Kevin how to start the well pump. Then Paula and Fred went back to the main house. Kevin and Chad put up a mosquito net over each bed. They duct-taped the big open spaces around the doors and windows. (Always take duct tape wherever you travel.)

We showered (cold water which seemed colder because we were so hot), and went to bed. I read a little more of John Grisham’s book, The Testament. I am not an avid fiction reader but Robin suggested I might like it since it took place in Brazil. That night I dreamt that I contracted some rare disease and that markings on my arms turned to worms. It was, I’m sure, because we had talked about a case of Filaria at dinner; although, as an after reflection, it might have been a premonition of severe allergy to come.

The morning of March 18th, I woke up early to the howling of a puppy. It was on the back fenced in porch. I am not certain how it got trapped there. Remembering

Paula's warning about mange, I used a sack and picked the pup up and put it back over the chicken wire fencing. I talked to the pup until it quieted down. Eventually, the pup found its way back to its mother.

Kevin was already out and about taking pictures. Later, the four of us walked to the main house.

The road was muddy with standing water in low lying spots. Our new travel pants were soon spattered with red clay. Robin snapped a picture of Chad gingerly holding up his pant legs. Later, Robin spent hours trying to get the clothes clean. She decided it was not the way God wanted her to spend her time in Brazil. We would just wear the mud spots as part of our initiation rite into Brazilian life.

Though it was early morning, the heat and humidity made the sweat trickle down my back. It wasn't going to be easy to stay clean and dry. Tiny mimosa was growing along the edge of the road. I bent down and stroked a leaf to make certain it was mimosa. It folded up. There were glossy ficus, palm and citrus trees towering over grasses and sedges. I longed to see if my classification skills still existed.

We crossed a stream as the road sloped upward to a six foot iron gate. Locked. We couldn't determine if there was a better way around and so we all climbed the gate and proceeded to the main house. The worker's quarters were to our right. The main house set back about one and a half city blocks. It was a wooden building raised up on two foot posts. A porch skirted three sides of the house. The roof was rippled, asbestos sheeting. The windows had green screening nailed around the frames.

There was an indoor toilet there as well but the kitchen was detached. The kitchen was built on a slab of cement about 14 feet by 14 feet. The framework was wood. Green screening surrounded the entire wooden frame. There was just enough room for stove, refrigerator, freezer, washer, counter and sink, a picnic table with benches and a central counter with storage cabinets. Some plastic was hung outside to protect the backs of the appliances from rain.

"Don't worry about mud," said Paula, "you can't keep this floor clean."

Between the river and the kitchen, stood a small wooden frame "building" covered with plastic. Above the plastic, I saw what looked like a black cast iron bucket hung suspended by cable. This was the Boleys' makeshift shower. Black plastic served as the walls of the "shower". To shower, the raised kettle was filled with hot water and released through a valve at the bottom. The shower operated by pulling the valve open to let the water shower down.

The small river separated the main house from a shortcut to the guesthouse. A narrow tree trunk served as a bridge across the river.

For breakfast, we ate granola and nut bread, coffee and tea, mamao (papaya), biriba, and melon.

Paula apologized, "I keep meaning to clean out that cobweb (hanging in the light fixture above the marble countertop) but there just always seems to be more important things to do, you know, priorities!"

A chameleon scurried across the screening that surrounded the framework of the kitchen. A trail of ants could be seen making its way around the kitchen on the horizontal supports. We had devotions.

Fred excused himself from our company. The combe needed to be taken into town to be repaired. Paula gave us a tour.

“That beautiful old tree with the dark green canopy is a Brazilian Castanha nut tree and over there are some limes. We might be able to find some that are ready for picking now.”

There was one rubber tree on the property. It had the spiral cuttings of having been bled before - a long time ago. I didn't remember the names of the fruit trees for they were many. Porto Velho's economy was built on the rubber trade and logging of trees.

She took us back down the road and introduced us to two workers, Juan and Edilsam. They were clearing land. Paula greeted the workers in Portuguese and translated a joke that Chad had told. I managed, “bom dia,” which means “good day”.

Soon it was time for lunch. Paula took a cupuacu (koo pwa soo) and dropped it on the cement floor of the kitchen, to crack the rind.

“Here, Lori. Cut the flesh off the pith and from around the large almond like seeds. We're gonna make ice cream.”

Paula also cooked linguica sausage for the workers; but we all enjoyed it. After lunch, Juan and Edilsam helped Chad and Kevin pick out a hardwood tree. The men were anxious to “play with their toys”. They built a bridge across the river.

Chad later journaled about how close to God's glory he felt and how amazed he was at the level of energy God was giving him for the tasks. Robin and I could hear the chain saw humming as we widened and deepened a drainage ditch around the house. We saved some grass clumps to transplant around the guesthouse, and we put the rest of the dirt in low spots and old postholes. Paula was washing dishes and preparing dinner. I stopped to rest and to talk to her.

“Oh, listen,” she said. “You hear that? Sounds like a palm branch is coming down.”

I followed Paula's gaze upward just as she yelled, “Lorraine, jump now!”

I did.

Where I had been standing, there was a 12-foot palm branch with half the laundry line under it.

“Well,” joked Robin. “I guess we know who the prayer warrior is.”

So you think the devil's out to get me?

I nodded. *Don't travel without duct tape, or the refuge of God.*

By the end of the day, all of us were dripping sweat and our clothes were muddy. My leather hiking boots were caked with mud. We stopped and ate limes from the lime tree. The food and fellowship were great. It was wonderful to hear about the plans and hopes of what God was doing in this Indian Ministry center and allowing us to take part.

We walked back to the guesthouse and showered. The cold water shocked my system causing me to use as little water as possible and take as short a shower as I could. Later I rested and finished reading The Testament.

How far were we from John Grisham's Campo Grande and the wilderness pantanal he wrote about? Hmmm, duct tape, the refuge of God and a map.

Soon it was the next day, March 19. Kevin showed me how to start the well pump. He looped one wire to another (real hi-tech!). The water began to trickle from the well into the water tank. The water tank held about 1000L and sat 5 meters above the ground. Two toucans flew in the high trees. Kevin snapped pictures.

When we were all ready, it was back to the main house for breakfast. At breakfast, Kevin tried again to differentiate between the various fruits. The biriba was

the one that looked like a yellow grenade. Pupunha was the one whose flesh looked like yam and grew in clusters on palm trees that were skirted with spikes. Tucuma was thin-fleshed and usually orange with bright orange flesh and had a mild, sweet flavor.

After breakfast, Fred showed Kevin a homemade snake-bite zapper. Fred had taken old motor coils and hooked them to batteries.

“One end of this circuit you place on one side of the bite and the other end goes on the other side of the bite. Here, I’ll show you.”

Kevin jumped as the circuit closed around his flesh. Fred swore this worked on bites.

It might be that this interrupts the brain response and prevents the brain from responding to the change in chemistry.

“You can build smaller ones for mosquito bites.”

Later he picked up some more coils in town to make snake bite zappers for the other missionaries.

Fred and Paula tried to teach us a song in Portuguese. None of us were known to be musically inclined. We did eventually learn some of the words but it would be an inadequate amount to prepare us to share with the Amazon basin missionaries we would later visit. Try as I did, I could not remember the entire tune.

A cada momento, andando na presença de Jesus

A cada momento, andando na presença de Jesus

Ao sentar e alevantar

Ao dormir e ao despertar

Ao sentar e alevantar

Ao dormir e ao despertar

A’ a ando pelo caminho

A’ a’ a’ alleluia

A’ a’ a’ Gloria Deus

Scripture was read and testimonies shared. Each of our stories was different but every story did have one thing in common; a new life in Jesus Christ, and new fellowship, new hope.

A blue tanager flew by and my thoughts turned, of course, to nature. Paula and I talked about identifying the plants and taking a walk in the jungle, but first we must go to the “market”. The market in Porto Velho was an outdoor farmer’s market. Flies buzzed around huge chunks of raw meat that hung from framework. Canopies of red and blue and yellow mottled the expanse. Large baskets of fruit, grain and vegetables were everywhere. Occasionally I heard a familiar word like “Americano”. What else did they say?

“Well, nothing too kind,” said Paula.

I enjoyed listening to Fred and Paula converse with the Brazilians. I watched a little boy eyeing Robin’s camera. Kevin was snapping pictures. Nearby, two Brazilian women were arguing and it developed into a small ruckus.

Paula continued her conversation. She bought a bottle of Copaiba oil. Fred explained that the tribes were cutting down the Copaiba trees to get the oil because no one had taught them how to tap the trees for the oil. The Indians were destroying their own livelihood. This was a topic of contention between the missionaries and the administrators of the tribes.

What would become of the healing balm?

We left to go to a more modern market. We bought chips, yogurt, cookies, vegetables and water. Every time we ventured out to Porto Velho, we bought water. Before heading back to the main house, we stopped at a coconut stand. Coconuts were split and the “milk” enjoyed by all. Then it was back to the bumpy cascalha roads.

Outside the city, bones of animals were strewn along the road banks.

“Butchers drop scraps out here,” said Paula, “and then the vultures come and pick the bones clean.”

Farther down the road, there was a spot that local people used as a garbage dump. A flock of 20 or 30 vultures was picking it clean. They didn’t look as large as the turkey vultures we have in Michigan, and I didn’t think they were as ugly, but fairly close.

Fred stopped the combe at the top of the hill. It was the best spot for a wireless phone conversation; he and Paula called their daughter Angie, back in the States. I believe I saw more people with cell phones in Brazil than I have ever seen in the States.

Angie had surgery and Fred and Paula were checking on her condition. The view at the top of the hill was, special. The skylines in Brazil are one of those things you need to experience. Can you imagine leaving the city and your vehicle climbs upward; then you get out and walk a distance only to find yourself suddenly looking down into a lush green valley? It’s mottled with palm trees and termite mounds and cattle; and very distant, a horizon of trees.

How long would it take for a person to become oblivious to the beauty?

In the afternoon we hiked to the jungle while Robin and Chad rested. We discussed Green Peace’s dislike for the burning of the rainforest. Fred mentioned that the stretch of ground we were covering was flat and would make a good airstrip.

“Fred, “I said. “That’s one of the reasons Green Peace doesn’t like missionaries.”

“All this,” Fred said, motioning to the area we were walking through, “is secondary growth. It is what was planted or grew after the Brazilians burned down the original forest.”

The secondary growth was indeed different from the virgin jungle. Goiaba (goy•ya•ba) trees were everywhere. We decided to go back before we got caught in the jungle at night. I think Kevin and I brought back chiggers. If I had known how much they would bother me, I might have let Fred use the snake bite zapper on my legs.

At dinner, Fred talked to the workers in Portuguese. Juan held up his hands about 1 ½ feet apart as if he were measuring something. Juan said one word I understood, “...cobra...” Paula put her fingers in the shape of a triangle. Fred interpreted. Juan killed a snake whose head was triangular in shape. That usually meant some sort of poisonous viper.

It was dark when we finished so Fred drove us back to the guesthouse. It rained that evening. We didn’t sleep well because the dogs were barking.

The following morning, March 20th, the puppies were gone. *Jaguars?* As I wrung the bathroom floor towel out, Fred drove up. He didn’t think we would be able to walk over in the mud. Some of the low spots were flooded. Juan and Edilsam dug long drainage ditches that day to siphon off the water from the road.

“Amigo amigas,” said Paula, “you know what I mean don’t ya?”

“Yes,” I replied. *Friends.*

We had scrambled eggs for breakfast along with the breads and fruits, coffee and tea. Insect bites were bothering Robin. Paula prescribed Daytolatum, which looked like black petroleum jelly. Paula shared some other tribal secrets. Papaya seeds were ground and one teaspoon taken internally every day for eight days to overcome internal parasites. Papaya tea was used to guard against malaria. Goiaba or Guava is used for dysentery although one could always use avocado leaves as well.

The men had finished the bridge but Juan and Edilsam were still working to cut steps into the hillside. They used a machete. Paula and I decided to take that trail to carry over a load of grass clumps. I picked up a bucket of grass clumps and put it on my head. We made our way over the bridge and up the hill. There was a barbwire fence separating the two properties with a crude gate that we had to open by a loop of wire around the fencepost. Paula moved the loop and the gate unexpectedly sprang back toward us. It was dangerous; we must have still been in the “refuge of God” for we both avoided injury.

Where Paula went, Spice and Hecky followed. The stray horse was in a gully and Spice took after it. The horse responded with a hoof to Spice’s chest. Spice howled and faltered back. I was closest to him and caught him by the neck and began soothing him, “Spice, shhhh. Take it easy, take it easy boy. You’ll be okay.”

He was all right; a little sore and just a touch of blood and hopefully wiser.

The ground around the guesthouse was barren because Brazilians believe that barren means clean. It was clean of resident insects but the problem now was erosion. The land sloped down toward a river and when it rained, the topsoil streamed in that direction. Without topsoil, everything would die. We needed to create some pockets of plants to stop the erosion.

We worked in the muddy soil to plant the grass clumps, clear trash and plant debris.

“Are you getting taller?” Paula joked referring to the soles of my boots becoming encrusted with soil.

There were mud marks about 2 ½ feet up on the buildings as if the water level had at one time risen to that level.

We talked about keying out plants and finding out what plants were edible and useful. Some littoral plants in the river looked like arrow arum but I wasn’t sure. I could never keep straight what arrow arum was: sagittaria latifolia or peltandra virginica. Paula had a book about Venezuelan plants that had many of the same plants found in Brazil. It was at her home in Curitiba. Meantime, Fred and Kevin worked at fixing piping and other more mechanical tasks while Chad and Robin worked around the main house widening ditches and mowing the large expanse of grass and weeds. Chad remained relatively bug free but developed a bad case of chafing from walking behind the mower in the heat and humidity. I do have a photo Robin took of Chad looking in his underpants for ants!

That night we argued about the tribulation. Would the rapture occur before the tribulation or not? Lights off at 10:45 p.m. My elbows were a bit sore from slipping on the steps of the main house but God, I knew, would heal them. I arose twice during the night and early morning. I had welts all over my body extremities. It was an allergic reaction. I thought it might be from the maracuja (ma•da•koo•jaw) juice I drank the previous day. We had tried so many new things, it was difficult to be sure. Even a

combination of things may have been the culprit. I wasted a good evening because the dogs and cats were silent that night.

Fred drove up and honked his horn about 6 a.m. Breakfast at the main house and then Fred drove Chad, Robin and Kevin to the Wycliff center. Chad met the missionaries from the Banawa tribe, Barb and Ernie Buller. Fred showed Chad where he could buy tercadeos (machetes) for \$6, hammocks for \$17, and blowguns.

Paula and I walked over the bridge and through the hills and gully, to the guesthouse. Caladiums were growing around the Tucuma and the lime trees. Paula showed me a tree that smelled like cinnamon and one whose leaves smelled like garlic. We saw that the grass was already beginning to make a comeback on its own; still, we planted the grass clumps. I tried again to start a fire but the piles of debris had not dried out. It would have to wait for the dry season when the humidity would be lower.

Mid-morning found us back at the main house cooking rice and vegetables, and beans with calabrisa sausage. The workers came and Paula prayed in Portuguese. Juan began dishing out the beans. Suddenly, the plate exploded. Juan was not hurt. For two days we would find shards of glass here and there. We marveled that no one was injured. We truly felt God was watching over us.

Fred and Chad returned from Wycliff. Chad bought some blowguns. They were Banawa; the tip of a dart was placed into the fiber filled gourd and twisted. The tip was normally dipped in curare before being blown through the blowgun. I sent one of the blowguns to my son Todd who found out he could propel plastic tipped tacs with it.

It began raining at 2 p.m.

“God is watering our grass plantings,” Paula said.

Fred and Chad discussed plans for the buildings. Fred brought out a layout of the property. Chad worked on a schematic. Fred and Paula prayed for the different tribes; the Deni, Banawa, Paumari and Jamamadi. High in the sky, 30 or 40 vultures circled to the west then dipped below the jungle skyline.

We went back to Wycliff to pick up Robin and Kevin. As the combe pulled away, we looked back and saw the dogs racing to follow.

“Don’t worry about them. If Hecky can find his way back from 20 miles, they won’t get lost now.”

The route took us past the Madeira River and the balsams, the flat bottom ferries that carry semi-trucks to Manaus and back. Semis lined the route and made traveling tedious on the narrow road. Rio Madeira was a southern tributary of the Amazon River.

The Wycliffe place was grassed and paved but sterile looking. I walked in and felt as if I were in a public building with its brick walls and ceramic floors. We poked around until Robin was finished. There was a language room where materials for literacy were being produced. A library held linguistic and other books. The buildings were in constant need of repair because of mold from the high humidity and destruction by termites. We all sensed that something was lacking. Later, Robin said she did not feel the presence of God’s Holy Spirit there. We agreed.

When Robin was done checking the eyes of the staff, we went to get weighed for the flight out to the Paumari village. BJ, the pilot, needed to know how much room he would have for fuel. We weighed everything we could and then allowed some extra for additional baggage. Kelly, a guest at Wycliff wanted to go. There was some controversy

about the propriety since the missionaries in the village were the ones paying for the trip. BJ seemed open. Fred and Paula decided to stay out of that decision.

Back at the guesthouse that evening the four of us argued into the night about all the plans and wish lists that Fred and Paula had outlined. I was concerned that we would come in as Americans not understanding the ecosystem or what was acceptable to Brazilians or Indians. Everything must be carefully done with prayer. The enemy could so easily distract and destroy.

We slept until 8 a.m. the following morning, March 22nd. After breakfast, Fred and Chad drove Kevin and Robin back to Wycliff and then went into town to price tractors and take care of other chores. I washed dishes as Paula began preparation for lunch. Nothing was easy here. There were no instant foods or frozen dinners. Beans again. Rice again. That's what the workers liked to eat. While they ate, I sorted through years of language materials on the porch of the main house. Paula felt the workers would be more comfortable eating without the "women". I found a map of Brazil and directions on how to build an airstrip; so I knew Fred had done more than just dream. Paula confirmed our concerns from the previous evening and asked that we pray to keep her and Fred focused on the tasks that God wanted them to accomplish. Then she told me about the Indian legend of the flood. Most indigent peoples have a flood story.

"The people lived in a beautiful land where no one got hungry. Everything was good but the people began to sin. The beautiful land was taken up and the witch doctor threw rocks down into the water so that the water began to rise. Everything died except two men. They looked down into the water and saw their home.

They went down into the water to their home and from them came a new beginning. One man was the beginning of fair skinned people and the other man was the beginning of the dark skinned people. The men themselves bore children.

I thought of Genesis, "water above the firmament and waters below."

Fred took the tribesmen and had them sit in a circle. He played the telephone game with them. He whispered into the first man's ear and had him repeat what was said to the next man. In this way, he was able to show how oral tradition could not keep truth very well but changed over time. Fred showed them that they only had part of the truth.

Fred kept meticulous records of any transactions he had with the tribes. When there was a dispute, he would bring out the records and tell them what had truly occurred. In this way, they gained respect for the written word, and thus God's written word.

It stormed. Before a storm, the wind whistles in the trees and the dark clouds gather and the air cools. I remembered what Robin said, "The most productive thing you can do in weather like this is to pray."

Paula and I walked the bridge path back to the guest house. We planted caladium in an old tire, strategically placed to stop erosion. We mixed soil from around a dead palm tree and compost from the chicken coop to put around the plants. I also took some of the humus from the dead palm tree to use as mulch. Then it was back to the main house to cook dinner.

The power went out, which we found out happened frequently. Paula and I finished cooking by candlelight. Paula managed to make Mango pie and Peanut butter Reese's pie. Everything was marvelous! We had time to share, just the two of us, before the others came back.

"I just get so frustrated some times. Makes me wonder what God's doing or trying to tell me. Last night I went to shower and the plastic flew up from the shower frame. Here I am naked. The valve was clogged and the water wouldn't come down. It was just a breaking point, you know? Of course, I was crying. And then Hecky, the stray one, began howling; he was crying with me and I just felt like God understood and heard me and it was comfort enough. Praise the Lord!"

March 23, 2000. I decided to trade khakis with Robin. She seemed more sensitive to the "no seams" that plagued us and I hoped the shoestrings I had put in the hems of the khaki's legs to tie them shut, would help her when we were in the jungle. Fred drove us to the airport. BJ met us. We waited while BJ checked the plane's fuel level and oil and flaps. The plane was a single-engine Cessna with six seats. The ID read PT-KPS. KPS were Kevin's initials. When BJ was certain that the fog had lifted from the village, we took off.

BJ banked the plane up at 500 feet per minute until we reached an altitude of 6500 feet. We were flying between a carpet of cumulous clouds and a ceiling of cirrostratus. It was 56 minutes to Crispinho airstrip at the Paumari village, southwest of LaBrea and into the Amazon jungle.

The airstrip was a field of grass about 800 meters in length; BJ's landing was perfect. Shirley, a retired missionary, greeted us; then Meinke and Margaret emerged surrounded by villagers. Introductions ensued.

"There has to be 50 or 60 children!" said Chad.

Chad and Kevin stayed with the Paumari. Kevin needed to put eye drops in the people Robin needed to examine. BJ flew Robin and me out to the Banawa tribe.

I sat in front and BJ explained the gauges. We were flying about 30 degrees east of north. Fuel was burning at a rate of 48 Liters per hour at an exhaust level of about 1440 degrees. The rate of the plane was approximately 140 mph.

"What was that?"

"Those are storm blips on the radar but it's nothing."

Sure! Lord, are you here?

PT-KPS was equipped with a GPS, the global positioning system that received data from satellites. It was more accurate. All BJ needed to do was punch in his coordinates and it gave the distance to the destination and the ETA (estimated time of arrival.) Thankfully, it also let us know if we were off course.

The cloud cover was at 1000 feet and we just skimmed the bottom of the cover. In every direction lay jungle and water, muddy water and jungle. I could see water beneath the treetops; it was like one BIG swamp. The level of water indicated the end of the rainy season – the time when Anaconda are most dangerous to humans. We passed one other village.

"What's on the airstrip?"

"Soccer goal posts. People use the airstrips for many things."

The Cessna took us over the Purus and Pinhua rivers. BJ banked to come around to the end of the Banawa airstrip.

“BJ?”

“That’s the fuel gauge warning signal blinking. It does that all the time when the fuel temperature changes but its okay. I’ve got to adjust that sometime.”

Uh huh. Let’s see, duct tape, a map, the refuge of God and lots of trust.

This airstrip was not neatly laid out as the one in Fred’s plans. There were no drainage tiles like Porto Velho’s airstrip. However, it was adequately level so that BJ had no problems. I might have been concerned had I known then that leaf cutter ants often make holes large enough to damage the planes.

A village man met us and BJ interpreted for us.

“He’s taking us to see Jose. The boy has what they call rolling eyes.”

The boy was about 8 years old although he looked more like 5 years of age. He was crying and obviously frightened.

“His parents are in the fields working or hunting.”

He did what he was told. Robin put in drops to dilate his eyes and we waited for a few minutes while some of the other village kids watched.

“Was his birth normal?” asked Robin. BJ said it was. Robin gathered as much background information as possible. Jose had the problem from birth. He tilted his head even while nursing. Later the tribe’s missionary would give Robin some more key information. “Normal” birth meant that the umbilical cord was cut at birth but not cauterized. Soot was applied but it did not always stop the bleeding. There could have been too much blood loss and so a lack of oxygen to the baby’s brain. Other tribes used hot embers which cauterized the cord and stopped the bleeding.

“Jose’s eyes are physically normal,” said Robin after the examination. “The problem is probably neurological, probably some sort of cerebral palsy. There really isn’t anything that can be done.”

I prayed for him and gave him one of my Bio-Protein bars.

BJ checked the plane’s fuel and flaps and oil while the villagers got the dogs off the airstrip. This airstrip was 300 meters shorter than Crispinho. That was the main reason only Robin and I were allowed to fly the leg to Banawa. BJ needed less weight to clear the end of the strip. I noted as we took off that his vertical velocity was almost twice that of Crispinho. He had no problem and we were soon at 1000 feet. It was 28 minutes and 52 miles back to Crispinho.

We met Chad and Kevin at Shirley’s. I handed out some 151 brand of fruit bars. I convinced BJ to try one and promised him the rest. Shirley offered us some biriba but it looked a little too green for me and I declined. Besides, there really didn’t seem to be enough for everyone. Shirley was from London, England. Her translation work was completed and she was about to enter retirement.

“The Germans will come now and do the literacy training.”

Robin and Kevin went back to the clinic building to finish examinations. BJ gave the ladies their mail.

“Ahhh,” sighed Margaret at the months of mail she would need to answer.

BJ and Chad went to work to replace a register in the gas refrigerator. BJ had delivered a needed part and Chad supplied a Leatherman tool to make the refrigerator operational again. There was no electricity. One solar panel ran power to a battery which was used to show training videos. A second solar panel powered a battery that supplied 2 lights and the CB radio.

I walked around outside. The buildings were raised up off the ground about two feet. The supporting posts were coated with used motor oil. Pie plates separated the building from the posts and were filled with motor oil to deter termites. The gutter was connected to the water tank by an entry pipe.

“We’re waiting for a rain because the tank is only half full now,” said Shirley. “The Germans have some water in the barrels inside. They put something in the water to purify it. But, we could use a rain. Anyway, this water is better than the well which has worms in it.”

I wonder if it lasts through the dry season?

Everywhere the dark-skinned, short villagers merely waited and watched. I say short because I am five foot one and a half inches and they were smaller than I. Evidence of a longer missionary stay here than the Banawa tribe was seen in the better clothing and the fact more area was cleared and the children seem to be at ease with us. They laughed and played. I saw some with plant leaves cut to create a helicopter wing. They would toss the wings in the air and watch them drift down.

“They tried to gross us out by turning their eyelids up!” remarked Chad who managed to snap a picture of their upturned eyelids.

One of the Paumari brought Shirley three fish tongues that were approximately three to six inches long.

“Ummm,” said Shirley. “They’re getting smaller every year. The Paumari are living longer and eating more.”

Three pairs of macaw parrots made raucous noises in the treetops. I saw no other wildlife.

“While you were gone,” said Chad, “Shirley said she heard a monkey the previous night and she wouldn’t be surprised if before long, some Paumari had the monkey in a dinner pot. It was probably less than two hours and a man comes walking in with a dead monkey. He killed it with a 28 gauge shotgun. It was too human-like.”

Twenty-eight gauge shotgun – progress.

“Did you get a picture?” I asked. Of course he did.

Shirley led us back to the clinic and we checked to see how Robin and Kevin were doing. I talked to Margaret. Margaret was visiting the area to teach teachers how to make and use literacy primers. She taught them how to teach things like simple math. I enjoyed listening to Margaret with her slightly British accent:

“The people count one, two, three, and many. Or they might count in pairs; one, two and then one,” said Margaret using her fingers like the Paumari. “Their system is so primitive that they cannot understand when the traders are cheating them. Anyway, they don’t understand zero and have no need for higher numbers because when you have many, you have enough to share.

The people use the river’s height to gauge the time of year. According to the height of the river, certain things are done but they have no real sense of time. And so, it is difficult to know how old the people are – they don’t know! A calendar would make it easier.”

The distant sky darkened and a sent out a warning rumble.

“I’ve only been stuck out here overnight once,” said BJ smiling.

Those thunder clouds were the blimps on the radar.

It began to sprinkle. Inside the clinic, Robin looked at one last Paumari man. Meinke asked if Robin would see him because the man saved her life. He took her in a boat to get help when she was dying of Malaria. Meinke had chronic fatigue syndrome and the other missionaries thought it might be from Malaria.

Margaret talked to some of the villagers that had already been seen by Robin. "I think," said Margaret winking ever so slightly, "that glasses give a certain social status."

By the time Robin and Kevin were done, it was raining. We stood under the plane's wings. Chad bought a bracelet from one of the Paumari women for 5 reals. The women were a little shy to speak. It was an overall good day with no serious eye problems. Many of the villagers could see better with glasses.

"At one point," said Robin. "a woman was pointing to her feet and we were trying to communicate that we didn't do feet. What she wanted to tell us was that she couldn't see to take out the thorns in her feet! She was grateful for the glasses that allowed her to take out the thorns. Other people had dry eyes because they worked to make flour and it got into their eyes. Some people had what we call Tirigium. That is when the skin grows over the eyes to protect them from the intense ultraviolet radiation. Those people got sunglasses. But there wasn't any river blindness that we thought we might find."

These people were once a river people. Now they camped next to the airstrip. Actually, the people that had the front row homes to the airstrip were considered the most fortunate. It was like having front row seats at a ball game. The weather was decent enough for us to fly out and soon we said our good-byes and PT-KPS was airborne.

It was Chad's turn to sit in the co-pilot's chair. BJ put his hands over the instrument panel. He was teaching Chad to fly without the instruments, just gauging the horizon. It was a bit bumpier that way but overall, a good flight at 2000 feet. Below, there was jungle and water, water and jungle and the ever present Amazon heat. I was surprised that I could still make out a flock of birds; the sun's reflection off their backs made them look distinctively white against the green and black terrain. The closer we got to Porto Velho the more burned and grazed areas there was.

We arrived tired and hungry and hot. Fred met us at the airport. On the way back to the main house, we got fresh bread and Coca-colas.

What a great commercial this would have made.

I arrived in time to peel potatoes and squeeze lemons. We had mashed potatoes, filet roast with gravy, a fabulous raisin-coconut salad, served with squash and onion and of course, maracuja juice. The power was out. The men turned on the generator and we ran the fan during dinner. The workers left and we had devotions.

Later we found the power was out at the guesthouse as well. We lit candles and sat in silence for awhile. When the power came back on, I dashed to shower. When I finished, the power went back out. We lit the candles and waited. The power did come back on.

My skin began to bother me. Chad said it was chiggers. Paula thought it might have been a reaction to a jungle plant. Allerest tablets counteracted some swelling and I put everything on my skin I could find. Night passed into morning, for me fitfully, thoughts punctuated with a little Banawa boy sitting alone, fearful and crying, shivering on the floor of a village hut.

March 24, 2000. The sky was light and the dogs were barking. Nine red welts around my left ankle itched furiously. I could hear a low growling outside the guesthouse

and clawing at the chicken wire that surrounded the porch. What phantoms moved outside I did not venture to guess; but I felt a glimpse of what Paula struggled with in this land.

“I’m alone. I talk to God and the dogs. When I start to become afraid of some noise in the night, I just sing and refuse to be frightened. You’ve got to do that or you won’t last.”

Chad’s friend took a type of introductory course on becoming a missionary; Missions 101 so to speak. He came away with the realization that the bottom line was, “it takes the best of the best to make it in the field.”

I investigated the phantom. It was one of the stray pups. I went out and talked to it. I desperately wanted to hold it but what would that accomplish? It finally stopped howling and settled down to nap.

What happened to its mother?

What I thought earlier was the dawn must have been moonlight for it was still night. Dawn came soon enough and brought with it our excursion into the jungle. Our mission was to pray at the four corners of the property. I have never sweated before the way I did that day even in quarries that can boast of above 100° with no wind. Cold chills came over me several times and I wondered if I could be having a heart attack! Even in the “cool” of the jungle, sweat poured out washing away the Deet and any protection it might have afforded. The camera lens was covered with mist.

Kevin was in the lead with a machete. The leaf cover and fallen logs made it difficult to spot snakes which could be lying anywhere. Much of the path was not too bad. Every now and then Fred or Paula would break out into song, “My God is an awesome God, He reigns over heaven and earth...”

Paula said about Fred, “Give him a word and he can remember a song for it.”

Twice we saw a beautiful iridescent blue Morpho butterfly common in the jungle. The jungle is denser than the temperate rain forest in Seattle, Washington. Air plants and thick vines are everywhere among winged-rooted trees that stretch upward and upward. There were bamboo, ferns and bird-of-paradise; termite mounds in various stages and ant hills. Lizards would dart exciting Spice and Hecky who jumped after them in chase.

Spice was in front of me in the densest part of the jungle. He occasionally would lag behind Kevin and Fred, no doubt keeping my pace, and I would touch his back and he would resume his normal trod. Everything was damp. Leaf mold coated the floor of the jungle making the footing slippery. A trail of leaf cutter ants marched with their banners held high. Flowers of various colors grew randomly here and there.

We prayed blessing and protection on the property and took a stand against the enemy. We asked God’s intervention and guidance and for assistance from the holy angels. We asked God to reveal any matters that needed to be taken care of and for forgiveness for sins committed on the land. Above all else, that Jesus Christ would be glorified.

Back at the main house, I cooked chicken and rice and warmed Paula’s beans while Robin instructed Paula about all the medications Robin brought for the Indian health center. Robin gave Juan an eye examination and prescribed some reading glasses for him. The men went into town to drop off Juan and Edilsam at their homes. Kevin gave his knife to Edilsam and Chad and Kevin gave them T-shirts.

The men had a chance to see the German mission buildings while they were in town. Rhinehart was very proud of their research and accomplishments at the German mission. Chad was excited and impressed. The building was cement block with ironwood beams; virtually termite-proof. The ironwood is especially strong and can bear much more weight than the pine studs used in the States. Fewer of them were needed for joists and support beams. The look created a more aesthetic design. Though ironwood has less tensile strength, the fact the climate didn't fluctuate much meant less need for tensile strength which is the flexibility property of the material. The walls were open below the overhang allowing hot air to escape. Only one air conditioner was needed and that was for an inner office room.

"That's the way to go!" Chad remarked. "The Germans always do their research well!"

Robin, Paula, and I did laundry, installed a PDR reference medical library on a laptop, updated the Boley's address list and helped formulate a prayer list. To kill the ants, we put out a mixture of Boric acid and sugar around various places in the main house and kitchen. I rested in a hammock for a short while; the air was fairly still and offered little relief from the heat. As the hammock gently rocked, I felt a sense that this adventurous time was coming to a close and I was not ready.

The men returned. We went to Porto Velho to eat Tambaqui, a native fish. Kevin and I split the tomato sauce version, while Chad and Robin split the coconut version. Fred and Paula shared some soup. Everything was good.

"Muito bem," said Kevin. "Excellent."

"Yes," said Paula, "and it's perfectly acceptable to wipe your mouth with the edge of the tablecloth."

Outside, Fred gave a young Brazilian boy 30 centavos for "guarding the combe." He jokingly asked the boy how many robbers he had seen. We returned to the guesthouse and packed our bags. That night, the dogs returned and began howling. Chad swore he heard the growl of a jaguar.

March 25, 2000. Chad wanted a simple breakfast but when we got to the main house, Paula had fresh cinnamon rolls ready – the best, sorry Grandma, I ever had.

She said in her usual humble way, "God must have been helping me with these."

One last ride in the combe, across the red cascalha rock, bouncing up and down and side to side in the hot and humid Brazilian air, pushing the side windows open after they closed. Fred put the bus in 2nd gear to climb the hills. We joked about passing our survival course in Jungle Survival 101 but there was an undercurrent of sadness.

At the airport, we had Coca-cola and Guarana. Guarana is a Brazilian soda probably more loaded with caffeine than Mountain Dew. That was not a good choice for me. Soon we were on the Varig flight to Sao Paulo. I glanced out the window and saw the drainage ditches along the runway, like the ones in Fred's airstrip plan. The red-tiled roofs of the more expensive homes and the asbestos roofs of the less wealthy faded to dots. The Rio Madeira was the last thing I saw and then the clouds blanketed the earth from me.

I was grateful for the opportunity to spend quality time with friends and family. On one of the legs of the flight, a young Brazilian woman sat down next to me. She was reading an English translation of Kafka's Metamorphoses.

"How do you like it?"

“I just begin introduction.”

I nodded, disappointed we couldn't converse more. It was an appropriate selection for our group. In Kafka's story, a young man takes pride in caring for the needs of his parents and sister. He changes into a giant insect and is hidden away in a bedroom by his family. Family members are then confronted with life's responsibilities. They encourage one another to meet those challenges and their lives are changed for the better.

We cannot be gods to others, but whatever the missions, must encourage others to meet the challenges God gives.

We were the first to get to the Continental lines in Sao Paulo. It was empty but soon the attendants began to arrive and with quite a bit of pomp set about setting up their check-in stations. As they came, they formally kissed one another on the both cheeks. We watched amused as several of them, one by one, moved the pole that was at the end of one of the guide ropes, as if to try to prove they had the final authority. *Another piece of Brazil.* A long line soon developed in back of us. After a proper amount of time, they motioned us to certain stations and we soon found we had to pay some unexpected airport taxes. Tempers flared.

For me it was a miserable ride home – the Guarana kept me from any sleep.

Kevin said, “I'm going to take a long hot shower and floss my teeth.”

“And be sure to wash everything when you get home!” said Robin.

We promised to share pictures. Paula had loaded us down with souvenirs: buruavas (small wooden canoes) carved by the Deni, and woven baskets and hotplates. We had our own purchased blow guns and machetes. I would have the chigger bite scars to remind me of my adventure, for several months. Chad had diarrhea. All of us were still taking Lariam and would for two more weeks. I knew the others would make plans for the next visit; that took the edge off having to leave so soon. When I got home, I forced myself to do the laundry, stuck my monkey-bone necklace in alcohol, and did my taxes.

Praying for the Indian Ministry Center and our friends, the Boleys, will keep us forever linked. It is a magical place where civilizations meld and life survives in adversity. The human spirit is taxed but strengthened by challenges to the human nature by nature. It is a place where you know that if God is not kept in control, you do little more than survive this place of needs and possibilities, of nightmares and of dreams.

Each of us would do well to leave the comfort of our homes and reach out to give to a place and people that is so grateful for so little.

A week passed. Robin heard from BJ's wife, Chris. She decided to go to medical school. Paula emailed that six packages I had mailed two months earlier had arrived. Fred was having Bible study with Juan and Edilsam. Spice smelled things I left and Paula believed it was because he missed me. Fred and Paula continued to plant grass clumps as the erosion continued.

All the protein bars we left were gone and “abracos” – hugs. Hemingway said that travel “makes one wiser but less content”. I know now the depth of that truth for it still grieves me to be so far away, not only in distance but by culture and in time.