

Rapido y furioso and nasty mud

December 10-18, 2009

I think if I had to explain this whole trip in one sentence, it would have to be one of those sentences that all of our English professors in college hated us for. There is no way to break it down to just one.

In March of 2009, when Jim Palmer mentioned that he would love to have a group of young guys try to go beyond Musawas to reach further into the Mayagna people, something inside of me said that I needed to lead that trip. I had heard the stories of the hike into Musawas and how bad it was to get there, and I knew that we could put a team together with the right people to start this process. After months of thinking, praying, and talking through logistics, God assembled an amazing team of college guys around me to go and reach the nations.

We had a few goals. First and foremost, we wanted to present the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to as many Mayagna people as we could by using a portable battery-powered system to show the Jesus film. Second, we wanted to do as much "recon" work as we could. Since we were mobile and everything we needed for the week was in our backpacks, we could travel to new locations every day and log the times in the boat or times walking through the jungle. Once we reached each village, we could meet with the village leader, count the family units or houses, and see if there was any evangelical work established in that village. It was really neat to sit and get a read of the guys at night and see if they felt if the village was receptive to the gospel. Third, we wanted to see if it was physically possible for us to take teams into this area by walking or if we needed to find different ways. Fourth, we had a group of local "young guys" with us who were from the church at Puerto Cabasas that we were to encourage and live the gospel out in front of to try to strengthen their faith. Last, but certainly not least, we took the public transportation bus from Managua to Rosita to see the conditions and if it was an option for the future teams we send to reach this people group on this side of Nicaragua. With those five goals and the ultimate goal of glorifying God with everything we do, we set off on this mission with God and for God.

Timeline and Thoughts

December 10th – 3:00am (Thursday)

Meet at the church, pray and head to a 6:20am flight to Miami, then Miami to Managua, Nicaragua. We arrived around 2:00pm and walked to the bus station to catch the bus. Once we arrived at the bus station, we learned that there were no more seats on the bus and the only way that we could make it to the city of Rosita was to ride on a small round stool in the aisle of the bus. We prayed and got on the old school bus ready for the long ride. All I can say is that I cannot accurately describe the misery that eighteen-plus hours on an uneven stool sitting on top of rebar on a bumpy, rutted out muddy road was. I cannot think of a time I was just ready to be at home on a trip more than on that bus.

December 11th – 11:00am (Friday)

We made it to Rosita in the bus and not a minute to spare. The physical and emotional toil was incredible. Thirty-two-plus hours on planes and a bus were bad. We caught a two-hour nap and got into the back of a truck for four hours and ended up at Sunawas at 6:00pm to make camp for the night and get ready for the hike into Musawas the next morning at 6:00am.

December 12th – 6:00am (Saturday)

Here comes our first hike. We strapped on our thirty pound packs at 8:00am and headed up the mountains, through the creeks, and fought the knee high relentless and endless mud and water that just would not quit. I'm not sure it's a good sign when even the locals are laughing and shaking their heads at the "gringos" trying their best to look like we have been in mud like this. I do have to say that the guys did amazing. There was not one time that they lost their focus or their witness, and no one would have blamed them if they did. As a pastor, it is at times like these that you have to just look at the people you have ministered to and be proud of the men of God they have turned into. After six-plus hours and a great finish up and down a mountain, we reached Musawas, a city on the bank of the Rio Waspuk River. We crossed the river and settled into the school and walked the city and took a bath in the river and hung out with the pastor.

December 13th (Sunday)

Early morning we walked the city, talked about the plans for the week, and got ready for church at the Musawas Baptist Church. I was asked to preach the morning service and Hokel translated amazingly. The guys were able to share some of their favorite verses. We had two people give their lives to Christ that morning and Pastor Juanton asked me to pray over and baptize them right then in the river. It was an amazing time, and it was a next step to our mission to reach the Mayagna people group. To the best that anyone can tell, a white man has never baptized a Mayagna person in one of these villages, and I am excited and humbled that God allowed me to do this. After church and baptism, we got on a dug out boat/canoe and headed down the river, being guided by just the current and Domingo with a long stick. I think we stayed dry for about five minutes and then the water started again. I guess it really did not matter because our boots and clothes were still wet from the day before. I really believe that this was when a couple of realities began to set in. First, we were going to be wet all week long. Every time our clothes would start to dry it would rain again. Second, feet were going to be the primary issue for the week. You really never think about what it's like to have wet feet for fifteen hours of the day. And third, we were in the middle of the jungle, and there was a surreal sense of peace and calmness here. I think we miss this in our culture of busyness. God was really revealing Himself through His creation today along the river. I think it was mostly because we did not have to stare at our feet the whole time in the knee-high mud. After about an hour in the boat, we passed the village of Wingpulu situated on the banks of the river. No Baptist work is there yet, but there is one Christian family there among the thirty to forty houses. About thirty minutes later we got our wood boats stuck on a rock and almost sank it. It literally filled up with water. At about the two and a half hour mark from Musawas, we reached the village

of Sabawas. There was a large Moravian church building and twenty-five houses spread between both sides of the river. There is a small, probably 20x20, church building that the local pastors have put together for a Baptist church. We were able to stay in a wood floor hut that once we threw the rotten bananas out the roaches pretty much left. For the rest of the afternoon we went hut to hut inviting people to come and see the film that night. We set up and started the film outside and the rain started hard. We moved into the small church and restarted the film with almost one hundred people there. We were able to see two more people give their lives to Jesus that night. After the service, we cooked a quick meal and went to sleep to the sound of rain.

December 14th (Monday)

Can someone please remind me why roosters crow all night long? I thought it was only at daylight. I'm really not sure what happened all night, but I think the pigs, chickens, and every other animal had a party under the wood floor we were sleeping on. Around 8:30 we were able to have another baptism service in the river, and I was able to baptize another Mayagna lady. After baptism, Pastor Juanton and Canisio asked if we could have one more service and if I could perform a baby dedication for three babies and communion for the couple of believers in the village. We had a good but long service. I think we sang (or attempted to sing) at least ten songs in three languages, some Spanish, some Miskito and some Mayagna. We packed up, ate a power bar and headed out on our next hike that they said was going to be a rough four hour trail. We walked northeast out of the village and headed even deeper into the jungle. Two small hills started the day with deep mud and then started up the mountain they call Isahmill. Once at the top we all hoped for a place for a good view, but the jungle was too thick. We came down and finished at a small village of Padriwas. After one of the most needed baths of our lives, we were invited to stay in the government school that had a concert floor and some chairs to sit in. We hung up wet clothes and put boots out to try to dry and got ready for the Jesus film that night. People just kept showing up. There were only eight houses in the village but about forty showed up that night and two gave their life to Christ. I do have to say that was probably the hump day for us. We could all see in each other's eyes that the conditions were starting to get to us. There is no Christian work in this town. One family are believers and walk from time to time three plus hours to church in the next village. There is a generator at the school that could possibly be used in future projects.

December 15th (Tuesday)

Hokel woke us up with a great surprise. The village made us thick tortillas and they were good, really good. It was a great morale boost for all of us. We had a team Bible study and talked through Jesus raising Lazarus. It was good to hear the guys encourage each other in their faith that morning. We packed up and headed on the next hike towards Supawas. At first, our thinking was that it was not going to be that long of a day. We had a hand-drawn map that David Meriwether had given me before we left to add info to as we entered each village. The villages of Padriwas and Supawas on the map look like they are really close and both

of the east side of the Ri-Kuahbul River. This said to me that, number one, there were no big river crossings, and number two, it would leave us a good bit of time to be in the village before it got dark to get ready for the night. I remember it even running through my mind that we just might get there before lunch. Well, I was wrong. It turned into another three and a half hour hike through what I think was some of the thickest jungle that God has created. At this point, even the local guys are getting tired and starting to mark some of the singlewide trails that are not nearly as traveled like some of the ones at the first of the week. Pastor Juanton continues to be strong. Someone said that he is about seventy years old, but I don't believe it. You can definitely tell that he has been walking, ministering, and pasturing people in these conditions for a long time. Every time it seemed like we would be finished with a water break on the trail, it seemed like he would catch up. His gentle spirit, smile, and love of people really taught each one of us from the USA. God has truly blessed us as well as the young pastors of this area with a man of God to mentor them. Also, Canesio, the pastor of the church at Musawas was always right with him with his guitar ready to preach. I cannot tell you one word that he said all week long, but I know that by his spirit and how passionate (and sometimes long) he prayed, Musawas will be reached through the power of God. As we walked toward Supawas, it seemed as we were getting into a less and less populated area. The trail was steep, and you could tell that it was overgrown in places. We crossed five creeks of various sizes and did some pretty big hills up and down. Yesterday it seemed as if we were walking a straight line. Today it seemed like we were back and forth forever. Near the end of the hike Bo slipped and caught himself by grabbing a tree that had thousands of spiky thorns on it and ended up with about thirty in his left hand. We were able to get a lot out on the trail and our hero, Pastor Juanton, removed the rest later. When we reached Supawas, it seemed as if it was the poorest village yet, but after talking I think we were trying to stamp our definition of poor onto a completely different culture. This whole village was one big extended family. If the leader (dad/granddad) says it, it goes. Some of them had never seen white people before, and there has definitely never been a white team of Christians in this village or in Padriwas. The children were curious and would not leave our sides. This was one of those experiences that when you were a kid hearing about missions, this is what was going through your mind. That night, of course, it was raining. We showed the Jesus film in a small 12x12 mud floor school/church. It had half sides and was made from trees and thatch cut down from the area. We had about thirty people that night to stay and watch the film and hear the gospel. Andrew gave a five-minute gospel presentation at the end, and you could see the Holy Spirit working in hearts. No one invited Christ into their hear right there, but I know that He was glorified and fruit will come of it. The kids would not leave, but it was getting late, so we set up our mosquito nets once again and laid down to the sound and for some of us the splashing rain onto the mud floor in our shed.

December 16th (Wednesday)

Last night was a wet night. We woke up to chickens and children within arms reach staring at us. It has taken me until now to realize that this really is a content people group. The Mayagna people are

independent workers but live in communities together alongside the rivers. Each family has a farm away from the central village where the dad and older sons go to plant and harvest food. Most of what they have comes from right here where they live. The water conditions, during the rainy season at least, are okay and as long as the crops produce they can eat. Money has little value most of the time except when a person sets out to walk to Musawas, Suniwas, or even the city of Bonanza. They are inviting people who just need to hear the truth about God's redeeming love through Christ Jesus. Today was the last day hiking in the jungle. We have learned by this point it is useless to ask how long the hike will take because I really believe there are only two times that matter here, daylight and dark. But we asked anyway and the official quote by Hokel was, "Oh, it is very short, twenty minutes." So we started the hike. They were almost right. It took us only about thirty minutes to reach the river in Supawas where we started. We took a few pictures on the grass hills and headed to the truck to start the drive back to the city of Rosita. By the time we got in the truck, there were twenty-two people in with us. Heading out towards Bonanza was a lot worse than on the way in. It rained a lot over the week and the road was bad, even for the bad roads of Nicaragua in a four-wheel drive big truck. It took us at least twice as long. I think we could have walked faster and with less energy than a lot of this trip. Everyone had to get out and push at least fifteen times to get the truck out of the mud. We reached Bonanza and got a flat tire fixed, then headed the next two hours to Rosita. When we pulled into Rosita, it almost felt like home. The town has electricity, and the Baptist mission that our church has built to train pastors even has a shower and cots to sleep on. We unloaded, hung up our wet clothes, and set our boots out to dry in the sun, and guess what – it rained again! We waited until it stopped, walked into town, and bought some snacks, cokes, and fresh bananas. Since it was Wednesday, the church had plans that night for a celebration service and a feast. They cooked us fried chicken (hopefully one of those that woke us up that night) and potatoes. We are good and church started. Peter shared his testimony that night and the church prayed over us and thanked us sincerely for the work that week. I really think that they ministered to us that night as much or more than we did for their people that week. After service, we packed up and got to bed. It was nice to be on a cot that night with a good roof over our heads.

December 17th (Thursday)

Fireworks all night long seem to be a Christmas tradition. We all were awake around 5:00am and ready to finish packing and enjoy our last freeze-dried meal. I guess one more chili mac for breakfast won't hurt, but I think I'm done with it for a while. We were about ready to get in the back of the truck, and guess what? It poured once again. I guess it would not have been a fitting ending to this trip unless it did. We weighed in at the airline office in town, came back to the church and had some closing good-byes with pastor Juanon. He prayed over us and we headed off to the grass strip runway where we would catch the first of our three planes for the day. Two and a half hours later the plane arrived with no time to spare. Our next flight left in an hour and fifteen minutes and we had at least an hour flight. At this point it was a fifty/fifty chance in making the next connection that would get us to Miami and ultimately back to Atlanta. God provided and I wish I

could say that I had faith the whole time. We literally could see people getting on the next plane as our fifteen-passenger van with wings landed. We ran to the next ticket desk and barely made the flight back the USA.

Closing

God is so good! He took six West Cobb County guys on an adventure this past week and provided for us spiritually, emotionally, and physically. It was evident at every moment that He was going before us and was with us. God allowed us to become His hands, feet and mouthpiece to a people group that really needs Him. I think I can say that none of us will ever be the same. And I am sure that the people who heard God's Word and responded will be with us in eternity. Join us in praying for the Mayagna people.

Thanks and May God Receive the Glory,
Matt Petty