

## 2011 Brazilian Amazon Adventist Medical Mission



(Left to Right) Dr. Jonathan Babbitt, Dr. Raj Baman, Dr. Erling Oksenholt, Jacinta (mother of Dr. Babbitt), Me, Dr. Ray Lunt, Camille our translator, Dr. Bill McGee



This is my third year serving on medical missions with Dr. Erling Oksenholt, the leader of the missions. Every year has been a total adventure and life changing trip. However, I think the Amazon has been my favorite. I am so grateful for his vision and his God-given leadership and initiative.

Once again, all our personal items had to be in our back packs. Our two pieces of luggage (duffel bags) were stuffed with medical supplies. We made it through customs without even being checked, stopped or questioned this time! All medical supplies went through!



As the Correa Filhos sailed to the dock, Dr. Erling shouted that our boat was here! We were so thrilled to see what we would be living on the next 10 days! It was a great boat! I had thoughts of far more rustic but this was all open air and actually had two toilets on board! I had never slept on a boat before, or slept in hammocks...I was so excited, I was jumping and shouting for joy! We all were! It was definitely the time of our lives serving in the Amazon!



Lower Deck



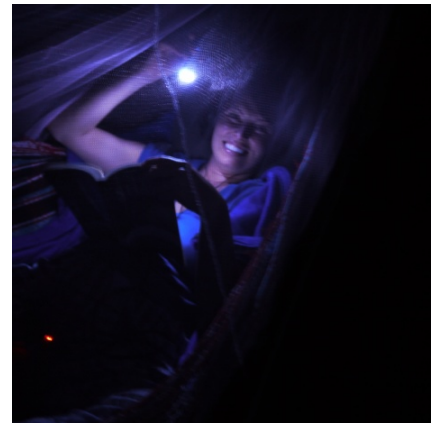
Stove and Oven



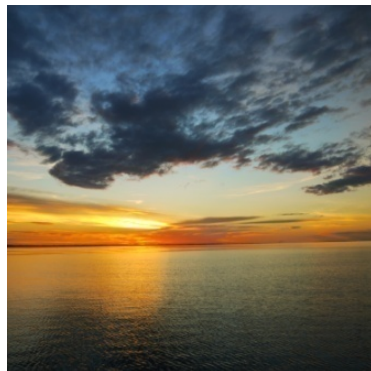
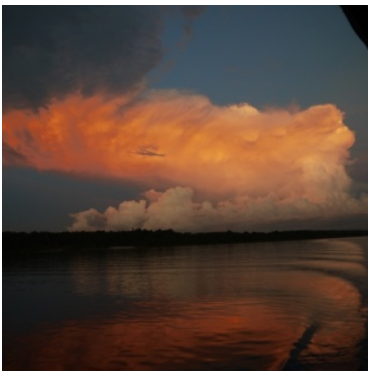
Kitchen



Our two cooks, Marion and Mary have both served on Dr. Erling's Amazon missions before. They did a great job cooking for us. Our food was all vegetarian. Somewhere along the trip, I picked up something that made me loose 22-lbs fairly fast. I was even hospitalized back in the states for three days. It gave me a severe intestinal infection. Doctors never found a parasite, but they treated me for parasites. They think I received it either from the food, or swimming in the river. Either way...the trip was still an adventure of a life time and was well worth the temporary trouble!



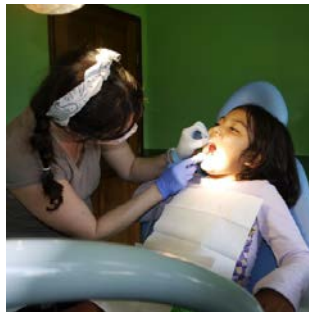
We all slept in hammocks during the Amazon trip. That was an adventure in itself! Sometimes I'd wake up way too low in the dip of the hammock with my legs way up high...tingling from lack of blood flow. Sometimes we'd all wake to the sound of someone rolling over and falling out of their hammock. It was kind of hard not to laugh when that would happen! Sometimes we'd wake to rain shooting in sideways soaking us. There was a generator on the boat that could be used for short amounts of time. The sun would set about 6:30pm and at that time all would have to retreat to the hammocks or get bit alive by the malaria carrying mosquitoes. That's when we'd read our books or journal to the light of a flash light. Those too were special quiet moments. The best part was swaying to the rhythm of the waves and gently rocking to sleep. The night sounds of the Amazon rain forest were mesmerizing. It was filled with all kinds of animals and creatures. It was captivating and magical. I would just listen in amazement...and thank God for the very moment of being there.



These are two sunset photos on the first night! It was all spectacular! We even saw pink dolphins jumping in front of the boat as we started sailing. There was something so special in the air, so magical, so spiritual there in the rain forest. It was absolutely breathtaking.



We arrived into our first village and to depart the boat, you have to walk the 8 inch plank to the bank. This was a nice village. It was actually more modern than other villages. They actually had a mini medical clinic there with newer equipment...and some electrical dental equipment! It was great! It's much easier to work on a patient in an electric dental chair than a plastic chair off the boat. We pulled, cleaned, and filled teeth in this village. Clinic photo below.



Late at night, for fun, some of the team would go Cayman hunting with flashlights. In Portuguese, Cayman were called "Jacarei." There were large Jacarei along the bank the size of alligators. They would quietly sail up on them in a canoe, shining a flashlight into their eyes, and then grab the smallest one...and quickly tying their mouth shut. We'd then take some photos and release. When I look back, I can't believe I swam in the same water as them! What an adventure!!



We went to a small Adventist church in the jungle. It was a nice concrete building painted in bright colors. On the way to church we saw the "normal daily" life in a river hut on stilts...the mother doing laundry on a hot, muggy day.





This was the first day we actually jumped into the river. All I could think about was piranhas, Cayman, man-eating catfish...among a million other creatures that are dangerous in the Amazon. But it was so hot and humid (almost 100 degrees daily)...it felt great to jump in! It was an adrenaline rush knowing that I was jumping into the great unknown too!



We went out for a nature ride in a canoe to see what wildlife we could find. Everything was away in the hot day, but we did find this huge spider. I didn't know if it was extremely poisonous or not, but I thought...why not hold it...everyone else is. I just had to have it on a leaf on my hand instead. To fill you in completely, it's dead...we found it hanging upside down dead...but it was such a big spider, we thought it would be a perfect photo opportunity!



Amazon showers required a mental adjustment. We could either shower by swimming in the river, or by pumping water up from the river onto the top deck, or by running out in a torrential downpour in which you could have a fresh-water shower. Sometimes we would jump off the boat for an early morning swim...but then you'd smell like river all day. Other times we'd rinse late at night on the top deck and just pump water from the river up for a shower. You'd still have to keep eyes and mouth closed because of organisms that live in the water. The best showers were when the torrential down pour would come...we'd all grab our soap and run out in our swim suites for a fresh-water shower...in the lightning and thunder storms!



Almost every evening a raging storm drenched everything along the river. The moment the rain fell, we'd all run around the boat and drop all the tarps along the rails. Water would still run down the floors soaking luggage and medical supplies.



Everytime we disembarked the boat, we had to "walk the plank" which was often a balance trick. We'd usually have large medical supply bags on our backs that would throw our balance. No one fell, but many almost did! At first I was nervous to even step into the water for fear of a piranha instantly eating my toes. Then I realized they don't come around unless there's an open wound. But the water always looked bloody red like something just got attacked.



The first clinic was in a school. We didn't have swarms of people waiting like we did in Africa, but those present had horribly decayed teeth. It was so surprising to see all the decayed teeth inside of one mouth. We didn't have electricity to see inside the mouth...so the chairs were arranged to face the sunlight.



I never knew that there are fresh water dolphins in the Amazon river! They are called the "pink dolphins" because of their pink undertone. We fed them chopped fish. We would often see them jumping in front of the boat during our sailing journey.



This is a river shack which didn't have windows or solid walls. At night they would drop the blanket. People in the village were lucky to shower under a pipe that pumped water up from the river.



Thanks to Dr. Raj, I got to perform my first surgery. He told me what to do each moment and monitored. This man had a golf-ball size abscess on his side. Dr. Raj had me inject the antisthesis and then use the scalple to make a half inch incision. Dr. Raj cleaned it out. The beautiful part of this experience was...

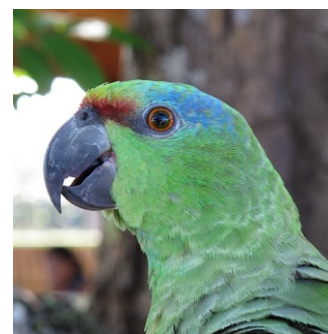


As I was making the incision, the words came to me in Portuguese, "quase acabado" "Almost finished" and I kept saying it until finished...then I said, "Terminado." I had heard it before just for a moment, but it sunk into my mind and came back just when a patient needed it. (Thank you, Lord.)



One afternoon, we sailed down to the next day's clinic visit village. We settled in, and saw a couple local girls fishing with an old pole. They were pulling up piranha one after the other! We ran over to the rickety dock and watched. They had a bucket of piranha they were going to eat that night. That was amazing to see! That evening, the boat captains went for

a swim to cool off and we yelled not to go in there...the girls were just pulling up piranha! They laughed and said piranha have been everywhere we've been! Just don't jump in with a cut! I didn't realize that! I knew not to jump in with a cut, but when the captains said it was safe to swim...my "safe" translation was no piranha or man-eating catfish or caymen in that area. Silly me...they are everywhere!! It still doesn't stop the locals from swimming.



The next day we held a medical clinic in a beautiful outdoor area. Once again we pulled many teeth, but no surgeries this time. A special moment was when a parrot came and watched all we did. The parrot was so bright with colors, and it was extra special seeing it in the wild.



The next day, we weren't quite sure where to have a clinic. Nothing in particular was pre-organized. So the Captain thought it might be good to dock where many canoes come in and out. We set up under the trees on the bank. You would be surprised how many spiders kept dropping out of the trees on us. I started to become a little delirious brushing them off. I absolutely can't stand spiders. Once again, we did mostly dental. The little kids in this area were so nicely dressed. They didn't look like children living in river houses. We thought there must have been an relief organization that comes often with clothing.

Ok...now for the best moment of the entire trip which we liked to call, "The Faith of Two Sisters."



While we were on the bank doing clinics, a woman floated in on her canoe desparately rambling and shouting fast in Portuguese. I remember turning around wondering what was all the commotion. Our translator stood still in awe hearing all she was saying. The doctors started gathering around.

This lady said that her sister, who is a parapalygic, was laying on the floor of their river shack, and heard our boat sailing up the river on Friday. When she heard the boat, she told her sister that the Lord just spoke to her and her sister must find that boat immediately. She said the Lord told her there is a man on that boat who wouldn't mind coming to their river shack to pull her absessed teeth. She even heard the Lord say that this man will have no issure meeting her with her needs by getting on the floor to pull her teeth. No one would work on her, first because they'd have to go to her home, second, they'd have to get on the floor since the lady cant sit or walk. She bagged her sister to find the boat and find the dentist on board. That was pure faith alone first hearing the Lord, and second, the other sister believing what she just heard and acting on it.

We were sailing so much faster than a canoe with a little motor on the back. We were long gone. Her sister believed so much what her paralised sister heard from the Lord, that she searched everyday for five days up and down the river desparately trying to find us. It was just by chance (or shall I say divine intervention) that we didn't have a clinic planned and the Captain suggest going to a common place. That's when we met. Dr. Lunt was eager to go help, and of course he had no problem getting on his knees to pull a tooth for this lady in need. She said it was just a few minutes up the river, but it was actually about 30 minutes. I wanted to go but there wasn't room in the canoe...just enough room for Dr. Lunt and Dr. Raj and Camille, the translator. I stayed back to clean up the bank-side clinic.

Meet the sister with great faith:



The doctors where overwhelmed when they saw her. She cant sit, she just lays on the floor, goes to the bathroom where she lays, and if it wasn't for her sister, who knows if she'd even be alive today. Before Dr. Lunt left, he wasn't sure what tools he needed because he wasn't sure

what he was going todoing. That's where my faith came in. I had an overwhelming feeling at that time and told him to take two of each supplies and two different tools. It was more to carry, but I really felt strong that was needed. Sure enough...she had two absessed teeth on both sides of her mouth! He needed everything he took. (Thank you Lord!) She was such a happy, talkitive lady! She kept saying that she just KNEW there was a dentist on the boat who would come! She kept praising God. Dr. Lunt said it would make him laugh cause he needed in her mouth but she wouldn't stop talking in joy! It really blessed him too. He said she changed his life forever.



Meanwhile, I finished cleaning the clinic. I was so disgusted of all the spiders on me that I really wanted to jump into the river. I was still scared though because the water was so dirty and dark. I decided to jump in with my shoes on so pirannah can't easily bite my feet. The Brazil helpers all

shook their head in laughter at me...silly girl. I didn't care...it was my toes! I finally got the spiders washed off.



When the doctors finished, it was already late in the day, when the evening storms arrive. They saw the ominous clouds ready to dump rain, and the winds starting picking up. Both doctors starting covering their bags with plastic and began to worry about the big waves forming that could flip a canoe. The sister steering the canoe noticed their anxiety, and then raised her hand to the sky and spoke out loud to the sky. The translator said she had just commanded the winds, rain, and threat to be held back in Jesus's name until she drops the doctors off and returns safely to her sister. Guess what? The sky rumbled,

lightning flashed and the wind was begging to roar but it couldn't! Even us back at the boat noticed how strange it was that such threatening weather was happening, yet nothing was happening? When we heard the sister commanded it to wait...we were in awe. Its something we know we can do through Jesus's name, yet we just don't do because we don't think about it! I will never forget it. The doctors arrived safely back, and it still didn't rain for about another half hour later...probably right when the sister arrived home. When we saw the photos of the sister on the floor, we were humbled. What an honor to serve. We all felt she must have been the main reason we were sent to the Amazon.



The next day we got off the boat and hiked (in the Amazon down-pour) to a tribal village. That was amazing! We spent a while with them. They did a ceremonial dance, and the Chief came straight to me to do this dance with him! I thought to myself that this was it...I won't be going back to the USA...I was just becoming his ceremonial wife and don't know it! It's funny where the imagination goes! But it was a husband/wife dance...and then I got chosen! You would think, could it be true? 😊







We took a canoe over to a river shack to visit a man. A little girl walked out with, what looked like a stuffed animal. It was a real animal...a sloth! He just moved so slow that it was hard to tell he was real! She carried him around like her own little baby. It was so adorable! Of course, we all had to cuddle the sloth. I teased Dr. Raj and had to get a photo of him with the sloth, because I thought there was a resemblance! I think it's the beard! ☺



Then we walked to the room next door to find a HUGE Anaconda coiled up on the ground...a pet, as well. That took my breath away! I have nightmares of snakes attacking me! Apparently the snake was near by so the man just brought him inside. A moment of courage came over me to seize the moment. A snake in the wild is probably the most dangerous. However, I requested to put the snake on me! I had to get over the fear of snakes. It took a couple guys to lift him. He was over 10ft long and extremely heavy. I didn't realize it, but I was

holding his head upside down which was irritating him. As you can see in the photo, he started to squeeze my neck. I kept yelling, quick, take the photo! The doctors said I had an awful look on my face and to smile. I yelled that I didn't care if I was smiling, just take the photo!! So they did. That was totally amazing to be in the midst of my fear feeling that Anaconda pulling me down and squeezing my neck...but then having two guys lift him off...and fear confronted. Fear overcome? Not sure yet.



Towards the end of our mission, we took a few play days. We visited a Brazilian animal conservatory, and walked in nature among them. It was so beautiful hearing all the sounds of all creatures.





Then we took our boat all the way to the top of the river where the Amazon River and Negro River meet and collided. The Negro is the black river, and the Amazon is the muddy river. The currents were very strong there. We climbed to the roof of the boat so we could see it better. It too was so amazing.



Copacabana Beach



Lastly, we spent a few days in Rio de Janeiro. It was so beautiful and cultural there! We visited the large Jesus statue and it was actually quite powerful standing there. Looking down from where the statue looks, Jesus has his arms spread wide to the poor, the rich, the good, and the bad in Rio...and there's a lot of that there! At night the statue has lights shining on it.

It was such a special time. I think the Amazon was my most favorite mission trip of all. Maybe because I always wanted to be a jungle missionary and sleep on the river in a hammock, helping others along the way. Maybe because a secret side of me always wanted to be "Jerusha of the Jungle" sharing God's love with others. I just really loved it and will forever be grateful for the opportunity to serve in the Brazilian Amazon! Thank you, Lord, and thank you to everyone who supported me with prayer and finances. Wow, what an adventure!!!