

Thank God for the Mud

God called us to take the whole gospel to the whole world. I received a Cessna seaplane to help facilitate travel. My home base was in Manaus, 1000 miles away. Flying along the crooked, muddy, Jurua River for safety, the green rain forest, stretched to the horizon on all sides. My destination was Cruzeiro do Sul, the far west of Brazil near Peru. If all went well, tugboats with barges from Manaus would ply rivers for 40 days and nights in rainy season to bring heavy cargo to this remote city with no outside roads. I wanted to plant His name there and splashed down the first time on this tributary of the upper Amazonian in 1973.

Taxiing along on the water and looking for a safe place to tie up, huge dugout canoes noisily plowed the brown waters on each side of the seaplane. Their four-cycle engines turned on a transom pin under a long shaft with a propeller. They delivered passengers, livestock or groceries to or from dwellings along this crooked river. Upriver, I spotted larger boats with their high oval roof canapés tied side by side. They blocked any possibility that my “boat with wings” could also join them in their tight-fitting “parking lot”. Seaplane pilots soon learn to tie up in sheltered areas to protect their fiberglass-tipped wings. Further ahead lay a low flat beach with high bushes nearby that seemed the ideal choice to tie up my Cessna seaplane to weather any night storm. I was downtown below the river bank and curious folks stared from the high bank.

Three plane lengths from the shore, I pulled the mixture. The idling propeller came to a stop. The floatplane slowly coasted to a slow “soft” stop. With current pushing on one side I had to move fast. I quickly unbuckled my safety belt, grabbed the coiled rope, opened the door, stepped on the pontoon, hurriedly ducked the wing strut, ran to the front, dropped a loop of rope around the pontoon’s front rope cleat and with the other end of the rope in hand, jumped for the shore.

Wow! What a surprise! The “shore” I saw was quicksand! When I stopped sinking it leveled with my belt. The crowd on the upper bank roared with laughter! Now I knew why no boats docked in this sand-like muck.

The river bank was lined with hundreds of curious spectators. They stood like toothpicks trying to figure out who had come and had never seen an airplane maneuvering on the water by a turning propeller up front and behind, lowered water rudders that guided it to avoid the debris in the river’s fast-moving current and reversing eddies. It seemed I was on television. Every time I moved in this mud the deeper I sank. The suction of pulling one leg higher only lowered the other that much and more. The bank crowd with every move I made, laughed again and again. I have learned to talk to myself positively when in trouble, so I consoled myself of worse situations. At least I am not up flying, in bad weather, nearly out of gas and night coming on.

Something seemed to whisper in my ear, “And you are going to start a new church in this city? It will never happen! Go home! You are the laughing stock of the town!”

A dugout canoe slowly eased up alongside of me. The owner dropped a flat wide board under my arm pit and in Portuguese told me to work myself out of the mud and up onto it. It seemed like an eternity, but I made it and rolled into his canoe. He dug out my shoes and washed the muck off.

We now fast forward thirty nine years to September 2, 2012.

I do not personally fly a seaplane where I can go faster, and cheaper on commercial air lines. Cruzeiro do Sul is now connected to Brazil with daily jet flights and a paved road hundreds of miles. I landed on Gol flight 1939 at 1:30 in afternoon thirty nine years later and walked with baggage to airport reception area. When I came through the glass airport door to reception I was surprised and embarrassed to see a plastic banner welcoming "The Bishop of UPC of Brazil" held by many church people and Bible school students and singing the national church song with airport security watching. I was ushered to their shiny vehicle that took me to their pre-paid first class hotel down town. Looking through the back window of the car I tried to hide my weeping as I looked at a motorcade of Bible school students and church members. The city is district headquarters for west Acre whose already divided area still has 30 churches. I spoke to our local ABI group of 45 Bible school students and college trained teachers. I signed and gave all a copy in Portuguese of my book, "Full Throttle". I love and appreciate all who sacrifice for His cause and His Name.

In church service that night there was standing room only. I value the low valley experiences that He has turned around. Satan is a liar!

To God be the glory!

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