

Amazon Journey: It's a Rainforest Out There – Part 2

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I have always thought of Father as indestructible and eternally vigorous. At this moment though, he looked to be every one of his 77 years. I realized in my gut something I heretofore acknowledged only in my mind – Father is physically finite. He will go to the spirit world one day.

But more than that, I realized that before he dies, Father will likely go through the same winding down process of infirmity, memory blanks and the slow, shortened steps of every other person in their 80s and 90s. His body will get old, fall apart and die like yours and mine. When I think of Moses and Ezekiel, I picture wise, elderly gentlemen being lifted into heaven on a cloud, fully intact, fully aware – muscled, gnarled and weathered like Lebanon's cedars. I don't see my Biblical heroes getting liver spots and arthritis. I don't see them suffering the indignity of incontinence or having a stroke that destroys their mind but leaves them lingering in a hospital for six months before they actually die. That stuff is for me and you.

The fortunate among us go quickly when we go. Maybe that will include the True Parents. Even so, nobody gets a completely free ride in life's final stages. Only victims of accidents bypass the down side of aging, the down side that almost certainly affected Moses and Ezekiel too. Sitting on the boat in the late afternoon tropical sun, watching Father put on sun block, I felt the first inkling of something I am sure to be thinking about more in the coming years. I thought seriously for the first time how it might feel to be around Father during the endgame, the fading of his physical existence and its incremental transition to new youth in the spiritual world. Father is not superhuman or supernatural. He's a man who has been and done extraordinary things undreamed of by others.

On the trip back to Manaus, Father and Mother sat on the top deck enjoying the sunset and the breeze. The rest of us sat close by. Father asked someone to sing. He sang and then Father asked another. Usually in these situations I am not requested to sing, but we were only about ten people and this was a couple-hours ride and so I figured my turn was going to come. I tried to prepare a song in my mind but suddenly I couldn't remember the name of a single thing outside of Happy Birthday. Nothing. I took a deep breath, thought happy thoughts. Still nothing. Happy Birthday. I am so pathetic. Where are those ministering high spirits when I really need them?

Then Mother looked at me and said, "Larry?" I stood up, and the second I did, "Amazing Grace" flew into my brain. Not just the title, but three or four complete verses, enough to put together a credible tune. On one hand, I'm grateful to my guardian angel team for supplying the song and the sheet music, but on the other hand I can't help but think they sure took their own sweet time doing it.

A small digression if I may. Amazing Grace was written by John Newton (1725-1807) and the inscription

on his tombstone in England reads, "John Newton, Clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy."

Like with Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," it is tales of a scurrilous blackamoor finding redemption and forgiveness, the turning of evil into good that resonate most closely with me and most resemble the pattern of my own life. Newton was a slave trader who was nearly killed in a storm at sea. As it is said drowning men often do, he saw his life and his sins played before him. He returned to England, became an Anglican minister and spent the rest of his life repenting. From the depths of John Newton's penitence, came one of the simplest, most eloquent of all Christian hymns. To hear it played by a band of crying bagpipes is to feel a sinner's remorse.

While standing there singing, about halfway through, I began to think of all these things and much more. More than think them, experience them. I connected with something. As I sang, I felt redeemed.



Father and Mother sat in front of me, side by side, listening with their eyes closed. We glided along the river, covered in the orange glow of the day's end.

9:25 PM – We are back at the hotel. Father (with Mother) is speaking to the Manaus UC members, most of whom are seeing the True Parents in person for the first time.

Father spoke strongly and softly. He growled and purred, pushed and pulled, emphasized, empathized, cajoled and twinkled his eyes for three hours, lifting the spirits of the Manaus members. He strutted, stomped, posed, stood and sat. The old man on the river had regenerated into a young human fireball. We who made up his traveling entourage were bobbing and weaving from fatigue and too much sun. I was fading badly, barely able to keep my eyes open. Occasionally Mr. Joo nudged me and suggested I step into the small bathroom a few feet away to splash water on my face. I was glad I was sitting in the back of the room.

The next morning, we had Hoon Dok Hae at 6:00 AM (Wonjoo [McDevitt] read in Korean), ate breakfast, checked out and went to the airport. We were in Father's jet, a 12-passenger Challenger. It comes with two pilots and a flight attendant. The pilot managed to get permission for us to fly along the river at an altitude of only 900 feet. What's more, we poked along at under 200 miles per hour. Mr. Yoon worried about us flying under the aircraft's specified speed minimum but maybe the instruction book that came with the jet called for minimums higher than what the pilots knew to be the real thing, a concession made to the lawyers perhaps.

Short of floating along in a hot air balloon, it is hard to imagine a more magnificent way to view the Amazon River and the endless carpet of tree tops in every direction from horizon to horizon.

Viernes, 24 de Octubre de 1997 – Spent the day on the river at Santarém. We rode three hours downstream to fish and swat mosquitoes for an hour. Then four hours back upstream, returning to the

city.

The excerpt above, from my handwritten notes does nothing to convey how magnificent this day was.

We didn't actually get started on the river until about 1:00 PM and I will never forget the beauty of the surrounding plants, river, the afternoon sun, air – everything – as we sailed out to where we were to fish. Especially memorable was the sun, bathing everything in those good old warm tones that somehow intensify the color in everything that is green. On the Amazon you are never far from green.

Mother and Father laid down on a double bed in the front cabin and napped for about an hour. I chatted with people and spent long periods just watching Mother Nature's show. After a while I climbed onto the roof of the boat with my legs dangling over the front, where I could be away from all people and as far from the sound of the engine as possible. It was so quiet.

I sat in absolute serenity.

Cruising along in the middle of the river, with the breeze in your face, is the only time in the jungle where you are free of the heat and insects. Being in a tropical zone, the Amazon region has only two seasons – dry and wet – relative terms to be sure. In reality one season is hot and wet. The other is hotter and wetter. October is the so-called "dry" season, supposedly the cooler period with fewer mosquitoes. If that was so, we could only imagine how hellish the hotter and wetter, more mosquito-infested season must be.



There is no place you can stand that is free of mosquitoes, whether it's the middle of the jungle or the balcony outside your hotel room. As far as I can tell, this holds true for every inch of the Amazon's drainage basin, which takes up one-third of the continent, including half of Brazil and parts of Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela. That's 2,722,000 square miles. If that number is too difficult to wrap your mind around, think of Texas times ten.

I was swatting mosquitoes the entire week I was there. On the two occasions I tried counting, I found eight blood smears on my arms, neck and socks after about 20 minutes (they easily bite through clothing). They came in waves, unmindful of their own safety, hitting high then low, diving fast out of the sun. Their goal was to keep me constantly slapping myself, and they were really quite good at it. It must have been hilarious to watch. When I managed to tag one it would leave a big smear of my own blood all over my arm or face. The squashee would immediately be replaced by a relative bent on avenging the memory of his slain comrade.

Mother and Father fished briefly and caught fresh-water stingrays and assorted crud fish, all of which they released. These were not fish you would normally eat so I could understand their tossing them back.

It was dark as we rode back to Santarém. Father, Mother, Mr. Joo, me and one or two others sat in chairs on the prow of the boat as we made the journey home. Conversation was sparse. Long silent periods were filled only by the muffled chugging of the engine below and the three-dimensional, textured blackness of the starry nighttime sky. Except for the pilot occasionally turning on the roof-mounted spotlight to get his bearings, we rode in total darkness. The stars were huge and we could see billions of them. To the other tragedies of urban life, you can add that most of the majestic wholeness of the night sky is simply lost to city dwellers.