



4WD Drive Bog

14th July 2007 – Stuck in a Rut

The little town of Presto has been going through a building boom. The Cooperación Española has been giving away roof tiles, plaster, cement, doors and so that people will fix up their mud-brick houses. Good on them! This is a great way of reducing fatalities from Chagas disease ... caught by being bitten by a nasty bug that lives in the crack n-refurbished dwellings.

Because of all the building work, our usual route into town was blocked by huge piles of sand and gravel that people had dumped outside their houses. We detoured down a narrow back road, moved some rocks so we could ease the Tan van past without scraping the walls, and made a tight right-hand corner without knocking off any protruding roof tiles with our wide vehicle. We pulled up in front of our friends' house where the church meets and the kids piled out to greet their friends. Sarah, our fellow SIMmer and a trained gospel clown, was also with us this trip to help with an evangelistic kids' program. I decided to turn the bus around for an easy exit later on. Big mistake! It had rained yesterday, and the irrigation ditch running across the road had turned to muddy slush. As I performed a six-point turn, both back double wheels got stuck in a ditch. I revved our big 6.9 litre turbo diesel engine but the only direction we moved was down.

Surveying the damage I noticed both back wheels had sunk up to the hubs in thick, black smelly mud. Now what? Our Bolivian friends rushed out of their houses with shovels and picks. We jacked up the wheels and threw rocks under the tyres, only to produce pungent black smoke as the wheels spun and rubber burned. Then we dug under the wheels to create a ramp for the tyres to climb out. Still no good and the front tyres were starting to sink now. We kept shovelling. Finally all four wheels were free to move. I gunned the engine, the motor roared ... the bus jerked and inched its way forward. Hooray!

27th September 2007 – Off the Beaten Track



We were last in a convoy of 4WDs – 2 Pajeros, a Landcruiser, and us in our trusty Nissan Patrol. We were heading for the remote mountain village of Carasi with a bunch of Canadians to give out radios that are tuned into the Quechua Christian radio station, and to provide health care. A church worker from the next village invited us to go because there were no believers there yet. Our car was loaded with sleeping bags, food, a portable ultrasound, lots of medical supplies, spare water and a jerry can of petrol.

Three hours of windy dirt roads and spectacular scenery into the trip, we rounded a curve and saw Jamie's red Toyota at a funny angle to the road - he was buried to the rear axle in mud! It was a sharp left-hand uphill bend across a creek, and he had taken a short cut to avoid the ruts left by previous travellers. Bad move! The beaten track is usually the better track – other vehicles push the soft mud off to the sides... where Jamie now was. We eased into low-four and across the wheel tracks, and stopped to give him a hand. No need... our friend Greg from the Pioneers Mission had already hooked up a chain from his Mitsubishi. Hector, a Bolivian co-worker, and some of the Canadians pushed, Greg hauled, and in no time Jamie was out and we were on our way again.

21st October 2007 – Slip Sliding Away



Our last trip for the year. We felt tired at the end of a long trip as we pulled out of Sopachuy in the Tan van. We had made this trip a dozen times. This town was on our regular route visiting country hospitals to provide health training and stopping by the local churches to encourage the leaders. It had started to rain, so we decided to leave before the road got too wet. The road out of town curves downhill to the left flanked by a drop-off to a river and base of a cliff. "That's funny – those wheel tracks ahead are swerving all over the road" flashed through my head. Too late! Our front wheels took on a mind of their own. I was steering right, towards the river, but the heavy vehicle insisted on going left, towards the cliff. "Straighten the wheel, turn into the direction you're skidding!" said the old 4WD magazine in my head. But we were already about a metre from the base of the cliff. I decided to stop there. We jumped out, chocked the wheels with rocks so we wouldn't slide any further, and waited.

"Don't worry, the road will be dry in half an hour" said a friendly lady passing by on foot. She came back with some ice cream for the girls. Meanwhile, rocks started to fall from the top of the cliff, loosened by the short, heavy shower. A passenger bus appeared, speeding uphill towards us. I went to warn the driver, and he shook his head. "We're not going to make it up that slope, are we?" he said. His passengers got out and skated their way into town on foot. After about an hour, we noticed we could walk on the road without slipping. Our bus driver friend and his mates borrowed our shovel and threw some dry earth in front of our wheels for extra traction, then directed me away from the cliff and safely down the middle of the road. Phew – angels in disguise!

16th November 2007

Our last day in Sucre before returning to Australia for home assignment. Our bags are almost packed and Liling is doing a last tidy around the house. My mind reflects back on the past 2 ½ years. Was it worth it? Gallivanting all over the Bolivian outback dragging Liling and the kids around? What did all those hours behind the wheel achieve? What about all those times we've been bogged on the road? (Actually most trips are pretty uneventful).

We had received some good feedback from the doctors in the towns we visited. They had already had the chance to put some of what we taught about Emergency Medicine into practice. We are encouraged, too, by the church in Sopachuy, who had just started a youth group, and were seeing more kids coming to Sunday School after our visit in September. That team of young Brazilian missionaries we had brought along last time to run a kids' club must have really made an impression. Liling was thrilled one Quechua girl became a Christian during our trip to Carasi. After hearing the gospel she said "No one's ever told me this before." And just about every time we go to Presto someone else accepts the Lord. Even so the church in Presto is still small and facing huge challenges – poverty, conflict, traditional beliefs ... and yet they have a vision to reach out to the 22 communities around them where there is not a single believer. I guess only the Lord knows the long-term impact of Project Walkabout. But we have certainly learned to rely on Him more, not to mention relying on our Bolivian friends who are not backwards about digging, pushing or shovelling to get us back on the road.

Points for Prayer

- Thank the Lord for opportunities to help medical staff improve their skills in country hospitals.
- Pray for the new believers in rural areas of Bolivia – that the Lord will feed and nurture them, and that they will persevere in faith.
- Thank the Lord for His protection in our travels, and pray that He will give us direction as we start planning future ministry through Project Walkabout when we return to Bolivia in March.
- Thank the Lord that Liling and the kids have worked hard to get ahead in school so we can enjoy a break on the way back to Australia.
- Pray that we may be an encouragement to our supporting churches as we challenge them about world mission.
- Pray for a peaceful solution to the ongoing political conflicts in Bolivia.

♥ With love and Christmas Greetings from Lawrence, Liling, Alex, Maddie and Annetta Tan ♥

“I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. Psalm 40:1-3”