

Images from the Road In Wild West Africa



It started as a normal day. However in Liberia a normal day is not what most people would call normal. I arrived in Monrovia eight days ago. It was my first flight for the year 2009. There are no direct flights from Dakar to Monrovia so I had to connect in Abidjan. Air Senegal only flies on Monday and Wednesday and their flights were full so I opted for Air Mauritania.

As the plane taxied out it was making sounds like my old 1982 model VW bug. There were screeching and clunking noises that made me wonder if the pilot had even done a preflight inspection. It sounded like we had picked up a cat on the tarmac and it was now howling every time the wheel turned. It was haunting.



I looked across the isle to my fellow passenger. He was dressed in normal West African Muslim attire and was now rapidly passing his prayer beads between his fingers. His lips quivered as the prayers poured out of

what appeared to be a dry mouth. I closed my eyes . . . "Oh Lord, keep me safe and please don't make my wife a widow today." Over the intercom instructions were being explained in Arabic and French, neither language giving me much to go on, but the routine was familiar. We were soon at the end of the runway ready to roll.

With a grunt and a bang, the old Boing 737 gave its final complaint and suddenly lifted to the sky. The squeaking noises subsided as the wheels clashed into the belly of the old bird and I felt myself release my grip on the armrest.



The flight was uneventful except that I had started feeling sick and now the plane ride served only to remind me that I was getting sick on my first day of a 21-day trip into three countries. I had relaxed but continued to whisper prayers, as did others on the plane, still passing the beads between their fingers.

When we made our final approach I was a little concerned because, even though I don't understand Arabic, I heard the Captain, the flight attendant, and one other person cite prayers over the intercom as we prepared for landing using the words "Inchalla", which means "if God wills." I assumed that our outcome was in God's hands as well and added a "by the grace of God let us land safely," myself.

Once in the terminal I soon found out that my 6-hour layover was now to be 12 hours. Flights were delayed again, which put me arriving in Monrovia after midnight. I sent a text message to those who would pick me up letting them know of my late arrival. Feeling sick to my stomach and rushing to the bathroom became my activity as the hours ticked by.



The pastors had been waiting for me for hours and finally we were on our way to the guesthouse. I was glad to be on the ground but as I climbed into the war torn jeep all I could smell was the gas fumes from the trunk. The 45 minute drive from the airport seemed to take forever. As I gulped in sultry air from the open window, I tried not to let the \$50 cost of my airport pick up bother me, knowing of my limited funds.

I came to find out that every hotel seemed to be full, so I had been placed in a guesthouse outside of town. Unfortunately all the UN and non-government organizations had occupied every available space.



I dropped into my room just after 1:00AM, glad to see something resembling a bed. I know the condition of most guesthouses in Liberia and sure enough, when I went into the bathroom there was no running water. There was no TP in my "luxurious" room either. I did find a broken toilet and a broken lock to my room door so I was forced to leave my door unlocked for the night. The temperature was above 85 degrees at 1 am with 80 % humidity and the generator went off just as I closed my door.

In Liberia they are still recovering from the war so there is no general electricity to most of the city and the country. Everyone runs their own

generators and they usually turn it off in the middle of the night. I was soon drifting off to sleep even though I could hear the distinct sound of a mouse investigating my bags for available candy. I was simply too tired to care.



For the next 5 days I started every morning at 6:30AM. My early morning shower was cold water. From a bucket, I used a pitcher to pour water over my head in order to bathe. To think I was paying \$35 per night for this place! I began to wonder if I was going to make it to the end of the week on my \$500 budget. As I grabbed the pitcher to pour the cold water I discovered the bottom was cracked and so now the water spilled out faster than I could get it to my head. By the second day I had drunk a complete gallon of juice so I cut the fruit juice container in half to make myself a new pitcher.

Each night I had worked too late welding the iron frames for the trusses of the new district center, so I missed the chance to go to any restaurant or to buy groceries at the main food store. I resorted to buying sardines in a can and a loaf of bread from a little store on the street. Each night I smeared the sardines between bread halves in order to replenish my strength. My arm had accidentally brushed a hot iron bar and branded me the first day, and I was now trying to keep it clean so that it wouldn't get infected. My dirty clothes had been piling up in the corner and I knew that hand washing my clothes would soon be necessary whenever I found the water running in the bathroom long enough to fill my basin.

Each day, as I walked the mile to the Central church where I had set up our workshop, I would pass by Barry's breakfast stand. He introduced himself to me as a person that loves America.



On his wall was a big picture of President Barak Obama surrounded by the presidents of the past, and he was already declaring Barak Obama as the next president of the USA. Barry told me that everyone calls him Bill Clinton because he follows American politics religiously. We chatted politics and I sipped down his strong hot chocolate made from cubes of sugar, sweetened condensed milk, and hot water poured from a thermos that looked to be 80 years old.

We had done well over those past 5 days to weld up the remaining trusses, but sure enough on the last truss the generator burned up and left me short of our goal. The volunteers from the church had worked so hard with me during that week and today was the day we were to stand the building up at the site. I had gone there to the district property on Saturday and staked out the building using wood formers to layout the whole foundation.

Sunday I had rested from the work but was asked to preach at the local church and then Sunday afternoon had joined the youth for a soccer game on the beach.



Unfortunately, when our crew arrived early on Monday morning to dig the footers for our foundation, all my markers had been ripped up and thrown in the bush. This was not a good sign. Someone was unhappy with us being there, but who?

We managed to get the building laid out again and stood up two trusses, cementing them in the ground knowing that the next day would be my last day with my Liberian team. The property is on the outskirts of town so we left 2 guys to stay there during the night to protect our wood and steel from being stolen. We gave them a flash light and a loaf of bread hoping they would survive the night in the open air and under our make shift lean to. Then it started raining.



As we prepared to leave in the rain, the motorcycle, which I had driven to the property, would not start. It had stranded me earlier that day on the road but we finally found someone to change the plug and got it

running again. It seemed the plug had gone bad again but no one had a spark plug wrench. A local kid was found who knew a mechanic nearby, and was sent to bring our salvation from a cold rainy night in the middle of nowhere. An hour passed and with the use of our cell phones we got enough light to the motorcycle in order to pull the plug and clean it. Now we had 5 guys and only one bike to get home and it was too late to find any public transport. We put three of us on the first load. Holding my bag and clinging to the driver, the three of us finally made it to the first main intersection where taxis could be found.



The decision was made that I should be dropped off at the police station where I could sit behind a fence in the presence of officers to make sure I wasn't robbed while the driver would go back and shuttle the other workers to the same intersection. Sometime after 10 pm the motorbike showed back up, we gave a few dollars to the last guys to get home, and I drove the motorcycle back into the city to find my guesthouse.

During the last few days, I was able to find another available guesthouse with running water and more consistent electricity and so I had moved. It was actually cheaper which was a major plus. As I entered the shower and went to adjust the showerhead, it snapped off at the wall in my hand. Fortunately there was another stall so I was able to finish my cold shower washing off the mud from the day's work.

I returned to my room and sat down to add up my receipts to see how much project money I had left. To my great dismay I discovered someone had stolen \$100 from my bag while working at the site. I remembered seeing my outer bag zipper slightly open and realized that while I was distracted with the work

someone had discreetly helped themselves to my project funds. A lock on my zipper would be tomorrow's priority. I finished eating my sardines and mixed fruit and collapsed on the hard mattress.



Tomorrow would be the last day in Liberia. All I wanted to do was to go home and relax for several days in my own bed, but these journeys cost so much we can't always afford to go back home between trips. Over the next two weeks, I was to attend two district assemblies and facilitate leadership seminars in each country. "Oh God, give me the strength to continue," I prayed.

On my way to the center the next morning the motorcycle quit on me again. By now I was carrying a spark plug wrench and an extra plug in my bag. To add to my experience that day, before I made it to the site, the police had stopped me, demanding my papers and fined me for not having a helmet for my passenger.



Of course almost every other motorcycle passing by had drivers wearing no helmet as well, but the policeman admitted the fact that they couldn't catch everybody. Today was just my lucky day because he had helped me protect my passenger from endangering his

life. After purchasing a helmet on top of my fine, I finally reached the work site expecting a final day of success, before I left for Cote d'Ivoire and Benin.

As I arrived at the site there were more than twenty people in a big argument. Apparently one family was declaring that this land was theirs and that another family had sold it to us illegally. They were now threatening to cut down my new trusses and destroy anything we left on the property. I sat on a bag of cement and ate my loaf of bread while our leaders argued for the next two hours. The final compromise was that they would not cut down our trusses, but we agreed to only secure what we had started and not do anything else. I called for a truck to pick up what we had delivered there just yesterday.

The generator that we paid \$125 to repair had only lasted 10 minutes before failing again so we were not going to finish this job today anyway. We retreated like wounded soldiers from the battlefield, hoping and praying that God would help our leaders sort out the problems among the neighbors, and that we would one day complete our district center.



I left on my motorcycle a bit discouraged by the events of the week. On my way home it began to pour. I bought a plastic bag from a street vendor, wrapped my bag so it would not get soaked, and continued my ride back to the city. My flight would leave at 5PM that day and I was ready to walk away. I took my final cold shower and tried to wring the water from the clothes before packing my now overweight bag. We prayed together with our leaders asking God to watch out for the interest of the Church of the Nazarene in Liberia, and after words of thanks and well wishes, I headed to the airport.



I had \$50 USD left from my extra travel funds of which I ended up paying \$20 in overweight charges. I thought to myself, is it really worth all this effort to try and make progress here in Liberia?

When ever I get discouraged on my journey I look to the Lord for encouragement. I see the faces of our young leaders who have survived through 14 years of war when things were REALLY bad. I see the corruption and the confusion that is brought in by NGO's and I realize that the message of Christ must prevail. It is Liberia's only hope. My few days of discomfort and frustration pale in comparison to the vision we have that someday soon that our Liberian Nazarene Church will be training up its leaders in these district centers. I see holiness revivals held in the worship center we are building. I get excited when I realize that those young leaders will have youth camps on this property. I am encouraged because I know many people pray for me daily and hold me up when I can't find the energy to do so myself.



Thanks for your prayers and your sacrifices. Without the generous donation from my home church in Moscow, Idaho, I would have never

even been able to make this trip. Soon I will be training leaders at this district center. Our team from Mississippi will be here in 2010 to complete our first phase of this development. Pastors will get their theological education and have access to a library of books donated by churches like yours.

Are you willing to face the challenges of today in order to see a better tomorrow? I count it a privilege to be a part of this dream for Liberia. It won't be easy, but someday we will look back and say with Paul " I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race!" Keep praying for Liberia that it will see the blessings of God and a rebirth of a nation with leaders that will impact the future.



Pray for our Nazarene Liberians that they too will not get discouraged but that God will work on their behalf to solve every issue. Pray for us as ministry leaders that we will have the resources necessary to administrate effectively and to keep the vision and dream alive for Liberia and for all of West Africa!

Even though that week was one of my most challenging for some strange reason I can't wait to get back to Liberia to train leaders and to see the work move forward. It must be a God thing!

For the sake of the cross,

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