



THE CHALLENGE

March 2022

Whatever It Takes

A 30th Anniversary “God Story” from Bolivia

Buckle in as FIA Bolivian Team Leader, Gary Ferch tells us a white-knuckled adventure of endurance that led to the building of *El Misionero* (a medical riverboat that has been used to bring healing and hope to thousands in Jesus’ Name)! Thankfully, not many FIA-hosted trips are as eventful, but it does go to show that God’s people are willing to do “whatever it takes” to assist in frontline Gospel work!

In 2007, a team of 17 volunteers signed on to bring the vision of Bolivian Pastor Saul Peralta to life. Pastor Saul had a dream to see the Gospel go deeper to unreached tribes along the Amazon River Basin through a medical outreach ministry. But to accomplish this, he needed a boat. Our team was slated to begin construction on *El Misionero*, a boat equipped to

carry teams of medical personnel and supplies worthy of traversing the mazes of Amazon tributaries to reach those in most need.

The team had landed without issue in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and were waiting for their next flight to Guayaramerín, the staging ground for the project. “No flights are permitted. The indigenous people have burned their fields and terrible winds have turned the jungle into gigantic brush fire,” explained Enoel Suarez, a partnering national pastor who greeted us. Smoke filled the air, reducing visibility to less than a mile.

We were given three options: wait to see if flights opened up, go home, or go by bus to Guayaramerín (600 miles through savannah and jungle to avoid the fires). The team

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Gary & Donna Ferch



Riding in the back of a truck

voted unanimously to go by bus. We would question that decision in the week to come, but we had committed to helping Pastor Saul and were ready to do “whatever it takes” to help bring the Good News of Jesus to these unreached groups in the Amazon jungle.

A Bus Trip to Remember

The trip started nicely aboard a tourist bus to Trinidad, Bolivia. After sleeping on the floor of a missionary’s house, Enoel took us to the outskirts of town where he handed out surgical face masks. He offered us no explanation, but grinned and bid us farewell.

No commercial bus service was transporting beyond Trinidad, but a local driver offered us a ride in his dilapidated school bus. Combating temperatures in the 90’s, the open bus windows also allowed dust from the dirt roads to billow in like a cloud. The reason for surgical masks was no longer a mystery.

We eventually arrived in San Borja, the last vestige of civilization for the three days of travel ahead. The local pastor, Fidel, warned about possible dissidents blocking the road ahead. Although a few eyebrows were raised, our “whatever it takes” commitment caused us to soldier on.

While driving at night to avoid the terrible heat, our bus blew a tire. With no spare, we waited hours until a passerby helped us obtain a new one. We were finally making good time until we stopped for a bathroom break in the bushes.

Loading back on the bus, we found it wouldn’t start! The battery was dead. We waited a couple of more hours while a local farmer sold us a battery he had at his *chaco* (colloquialism for *farm*). Off we went again.

“No One Passes”

The next day we came to a roadblock five miles outside the large town of Riberalta thrown up by the political dissidents we had been warned about. “No one passes,” they said. Our leader talked for an hour to these very happy but drunken men until they agreed to let us pass, but only carrying our personal luggage.

Once at Riberalta, Pastor Saul advised us that the town was completely surrounded by dissidents, but a guy with a farm truck could take us down an old jungle road at night to skirt by unnoticed—“he hoped.”

It was a very dark night and the canopy of jungle trees made it even darker in the back of the truck. We couldn’t be sure, but it seemed

We came to a roadblock five miles outside the large town of Riberalta... the political dissidents we had been warned about.

something was falling from the trees. “Whatever it takes” now meant flicking off spiders raining down from above! We covered with a tarp and continued onward... until we came to a tree cut down across the jungle trail.

It was 2:00 am, and soon flashlights descended upon us from all directions! Pastor Saul told the incoming mob that we were volunteering to help the poorest of Bolivia by building a missionary medical riverboat. After much debate, they said we could pass if we carried our own luggage out to the main road.

The Lord Provides

Weary and worn, we started walking only to be met by local believers who caught word of us and came to our aid! They carried our luggage and offered us food and water. We all broke out in a chorus of “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the earth hear His voice.” As we were singing, lights on the road indicated that a big, air-conditioned tourist bus was drawing near. The lone driver opened the door and said, “A roadblock has turned me back to Guayaramerín, 50 miles from here. I’ll drive you there if you want.” I don’t believe there was a dry eye among us.



Building The Medical Riverboat

We arrived at our destination, several days late, but a tighter-knit group would be hard to imagine. The next day, we started building the hull of the riverboat from the ground up—a vessel 53 feet long and 14 feet wide. Through the boat, several thousands of villagers have since been helped medically and heard about a God with such great love that He was willing to do “whatever it takes” to reach them—even if it meant sending His only Son to die to bring eternal life. ■



COMMITMENT & VISION:

Whether in Bolivia, or one of the five other countries in which FIA is at work, our commitment is the same: to assist missionaries through practical service and construction projects to speed the Gospel to those who have yet to hear.

How this happens differs depending upon the vision our ministry partners have to strategically reach the people group among whom they minister.

In the pages ahead, we spotlight two such partners, Tom and Claudeliz Ferrel, and the Pacaas Novos Indians they serve. ➔



Reaching the Paacas Novos

God's Work Among a Remote Bolivian Tribe



“Before, I was afraid. If the wind blew, I feared the spirit of the wind. If the river rippled, the water spirit would get me. I believed that jungle spirits would turn people into wild animals just to eventually become human again, or people who never returned remained wild beasts forever. I thought when somebody died, their spirit would go into wild pigs. When we ate a pig, I put a food offering in its mouth before we butchered it. I now know differently...”

Meet Ruben, a Paacas Novos Indian living in his small community near the Northern Bolivian border on the Brazilian side of the Memore River. He lives in a house built from jungle wood with a thatched-leaf roof and spends his day working small crops of mandioca (similar in flavor to a potato), beans, and rice with most of his meals being comprised of 3-4 different types of bananas. Sometimes he will add fish or wild meat if he is successful on a jungle hunt. His more modern clothes make it hard to imagine that less than a generation ago, his people were publicly naked and cannibalistic (eating their enemies as well as their own dead)!

First Seeds Planted

The first knowledge of God was brought to Ruben’s village through missionaries who arrived in the area in the mid-1950s. The Paacas Novos’ language came from the Chapacura tribe who used to live on the Bolivian side of the river. With most villagers speaking only the Paacas Novos language, a few youth know some Spanish as a trade language. Sadly, many current teachers to the villagers are Portuguese-speaking. Because the Paacas Novos don’t speak Portuguese, they do not understand their lessons.





Yet, teachers pass them without them even knowing how to spell their names. This is one reason Ruben enjoys working with Ethnos360 missionaries, Tom and Claudeliz Ferrel, serving with NTM Brazil.

“Those early missionaries invested more than 20 years in language and cultural learning before a handful of villagers understood the Gospel. Today, we continue that work by confecting material in the Indians’ language, and they are reading and writing in six months or so,” shared Tom.

The Harvest Today

Ruben’s village is located away from the river and off dirt roads full of potholes and deep mud during the rains. The Ferrels currently reach villagers using an old Jeep that has almost rattled itself to death traversing the terrible conditions. When the Jeep can make the trip, they work among the people translating the New Testament and teaching reading and writing using publications printed in the villagers’ own language.

FIA is privileged to maintain a relationship with the mission outpost among the Paacas Novos, periodically providing vehicle and equipment projects to support their ongoing ministry needs. Through this assistance, FIA has played a part in the continuation of their mission and of making Christ known among the tribes in the area.

“The Paacas Novos now have all the Old Testament stories about God, and we are in the final stages of finishing the New Testament. Many of the NT books also have

study guides adapted to their language,” explained Tom. Currently, there are around 25 autonomous churches with select indigenous leaders serving as pastors and deacons.

The churches that have been planted are strong in faith. “Each congregant can clearly articulate Bible stories about Jesus and trust that He is God’s Son who lived as a man, died on the cross to pay for sins, was resurrected from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of God, waiting for the day He will come and take his saints to heaven,” Tom said with a smile.

The Ferrels also help the people conduct a Bible conference, as well as youth outreaches, twice a year to grow in their understanding of God’s Word. Many have been saved and baptized during these gatherings.

FIA is committed to partnering with passionate and devoted missionaries like the Ferrels and organizations like Ethnos360 by meeting practical needs that help missionaries stay longer and the Gospel go further. FIA and our supporters join frontline Great Commission workers in this way and can rejoice together when hearing testimonies like Ruben’s...

“Through my time learning from the missionaries, I now know that there is only one God, and He is a loving God Who created everything there is. The True God wants to help us instead of kill us like the spirits I once believed in did. I know that I will go to heaven and not go to the wild pigs in the jungles!” ■



PRAY:

Please pray for Ruben and those still unreached among the Paacas Novos people. The deteriorating Jeep used to reach Ruben and multiple other villagers is limiting the Ferrels’ ability to effectively serve the indigenous people. Please pray about this need and join FIA’s fundraising efforts to secure \$10,000 towards the purchase of a reliable vehicle capable of traversing this kind of intense jungle terrain.



From Meningitis to Missionary:

An Interview with FIA Ministry Partner, Tom Ferrel



Gather the kids for a read-aloud and get ready to be inspired by FIA's ministry partner to the Paacas Novos Indians, Tom Ferrel. Talking with Tom feels a bit like being in the presence of a hero of faith while hanging out with a family friend all at the same time. We enjoyed Tom's honesty and passion when telling us some of the highlights of his faith journey.



Tell us a little about your background and how you came to Christ.

I was brought up mostly in Bolivia by my missionary parents. Working for New Tribes Mission, they helped acquire some of the first translations of the Tsimani language. I was raised as a missionary more than as a kid, and I never actually considered doing anything else with my life. I came to know the Lord as my Savior at the age of 12. I was baptized by my father in the Manici River on which the Tsimani Indians lived.

Around the age of 13, I had a bad case of meningitis and was in bed for almost a month before the doctors were able to administer the proper medicines. During this time, I reflected much on how little I had actually done as a boy to try to witness to others. This is when God put into my heart the desire to spend my life reaching indigenous people.



How did you become a missionary, and specifically, how did you begin work among the Paacas Novos people?

After the Tsimani New Testament was finally translated, I completed an intensive course at Montana Wilderness Bible College. Afterward, my uncle and aunt who worked among the Paacas Novos Indians told me about a young single girl who was working alongside them. I always wanted a wife who would serve among the Indians but had not had much luck finding one. I decided to go meet her. Claudeliz had already worked with the Indians for three years and had a good knowledge of the language. To make a short love story long...I met her on May 5, 1989, and we were married almost 30 long days later! That's how you make a short love story long—32 years long of happy marriage and working together among the Paacas Novos!

What do you and Claudeliz do among the Paacas Novos?

We focus mostly on translation work to complete the New Testament in their own language. We teach them to read and write, so they can learn the Scripture themselves. We encourage and assist the indigenously-led churches

by helping them to host youth camps and outreach conferences. We provide practical care through supply delivery or transportation for medical care, too. We try to take any and every opportunity to help them know the Lord.

What is your biggest challenge in reaching the Paacas Novos people for Christ right now?

Honestly, it's our vehicle situation. The roads to reach the villages are nonexistent or terrible and can become thick with mud and almost impassable. It reminds me of Romans 10:14, "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" How can we, "the sent," get to them unless we have a reliable vehicle? The Jeep that we currently have is just not up to task. Precious ministry time could be gained if we had a trusty vehicle to serve the people.

How did you become involved with Friends In Action?

I first learned about FIA 20 years ago when word reached me that an American was over the river in Bolivia. I went over to the other side to see if I could meet up with him, and it turned out to be FIA Field Leader Gary Ferch. I ended up taking him and a group of volunteers on a 4-hour boat ride where they fell in love with the Indians and our work with them.

Since then, FIA has done many things to assist our ministry work. They constructed a house for our single lady missionaries, financed and put a new roof on my jungle house, as well as bought two outboard motors for me. They have helped me acquire laptop computers and brought critical ministry supply items down with them when they are hosting volunteer teams working on other projects to advance Gospel work in Bolivia. We are grateful for all FIA has helped us with. ■



3 Ways You Can Help:

PRAY

Pray for Tom and Claudeliz, and for the dozens of other missionaries and organizations FIA partners with, to see the Gospel reach more nations, tribes, and tongues for the glory of the Lord!

GIVE

Please consider giving (even small amounts) towards our fundraising project to purchase a much-needed vehicle making translation work and outreach possible among the Paacas Novos people.

GO

Travel With Us Or Sponsor A Traveler!

Check out our recent and upcoming trips on the next page or at FIAintl.org/get-involved/trips



FIA Trip Updates

PERU

A team of 8 volunteers (including carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and construction workers) built Pioneer Missionaries Brad and Rebecca Howe's home in Peru. In 2-week's time, the team vapor-wrapped the house and sheeted the exterior with cement board, installed wood flooring, and roughed in the plumbing and electrical systems.

This work would have taken the missionaries months to complete themselves, not to mention the hassle working through how to do it properly. This 2-week period has been a huge blessing in accelerating their timeline for village ministry, to help the Ashkinika people learn about Jesus.



WEST AFRICA

Four volunteer welders made amazing progress on fabricating a steel-structured hangar to house machinery and tools essential to FIA's Water of Life well-drilling projects in Africa, producing 80' trusses to span the open spaces!

In their spare time, they even managed to drill a well to replace one that had become salty!

Get In On The Action!

Join FIA on the frontlines and speed up the work of sharing the Gospel to the nations through volunteering on one of these amazing upcoming trips! [FIAintl.org/get-involved/trips](https://fiaintl.org/get-involved/trips)

Missouri: OPEN SPOTS

June 5–11, 2022 or **July 10–16, 2022**

Facility upgrades/renovation work (general carpentry, rough work, electrical, finishing work) to support Ethnos360 missionary-training programs.

Wisconsin: OPEN SPOTS

Fall 2022

Facility upgrades/renovation work (general carpentry, rough work, electrical, finishing work) to support Ethnos360 missionary-training programs.

Deserts of Africa or Jungles of Vanuatu:

CONTACT IF INTERESTED

Summer 2022

Willing to use your skills in general carpentry, interior finishing work, electrical, and plumbing to support FIA mission work abroad? Looking for laborers willing to serve for 2-week trips.

West Africa:

CONTACT IF INTERESTED

November 5–19, 2022

Well-drilling team, serving alongside national pastors and national missionaries in West Africa, to facilitate clean water solutions in remote communities as part of ministry leading to the Living Water.



**FRIENDS
IN ACTION**
INTERNATIONAL



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