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Helping missionaries reach remote ministry locations through aviation.

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Les saying good-bye to his 92 yr-old African missionary bush pilot father.

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Dear praying friends,

This day Oct. 8 began at 4 a.m. in Fairbanks, Alaska. Losing seven minutes of daylight each day guaranteed an almost dark take off. Almost two weeks of bad weather had kept us on the ground, and we were eager to head towards Costa Rica, to the Cabécar Indians. Tom Murray from Fairbanks was with me for the long haul--all the way to Costa Rica! With the prayer on my lips, "Lord, you know what I need," I pushed the throttle forward on this trusty donated steed, and I was out of Fairbanks in a cloud of blowing snow.

This trusty steed is a totally rebuilt Maule M-5, but she is slow with these huge tires (adding two hours to our total trip time) and tough -- built for serious service, like a Clydesdale, not a thoroughbred. This plane can land on rocks the size of basketballs, on soft sand that is hard to walk on. The unreached Cabécars live in remote areas that will require a plane such as this. This steed with wings is only touchy on landing, and touchy she is, like a high strung filly. If I use the rudder too much or brakes too much, or too little, the plane ends up in a ground loop disaster. The closest thing this Baptist preacher has come to dancing is on the pedals of this small plane. I call it the "pedal pump."

Despite my newly learned "dance," our first landing in Alaska for fuel was at Tok, with a snow covered runway on which those large tires afforded no breaking at all! The runway was very slippery, and we left the runway, taking out a runway light as we headed toward the ditch! The plane was more controllable in the ditch than on the runway. There was no charge for the light and little damage to the plane. Some paint was missing, and one of four horizontal stabilizer bars was bent. I phoned the Maule factory and was given the advice that the third and fourth bars were for tail support when towing gliders and banners. No big deal.

While in Tok, we met a pilot who was 93 years old and still flying commercially every day! He had piloted B-17 airplanes during World War II over Germany. I hope I'm pushing rudder pedals and not daisies when I'm 93! I left Alaska behind for a while to see if this modern mode of travel can bring the Gospel and help teach the Cabécar Indians "to observe all things."

We were on the way in about an hour, but not to outrun a blizzard which kept us in a hotel in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada, for 3 days. The motel was old and relatively cheap, but a whole lot better than a tent under the wing for 3 days! Thanks to all of you who made last minute donations for getting this plane to Costa Rica. Thank you! Thank you! We made our way uneventfully, landing in a wheat field and a church parking lot in Montana, and in a small piece of grass next to a cornfield close by my 92 year old dad's place.

Eventually we arrived in Texas--so many Mexicans there, I felt I needed to carry my passport everywhere! A Mexican waitress told us she was from Veracruz, "a demon possessed town," in her own words, owned by the Zeta drug cartel. Now, the drug cartel could possibly want a go-anywhere airplane like mine.

At all Mexican airports, we were greeted by soldiers with machine guns. I had heard that sometimes crooked airport personnel would call the cartel to come steal a plane. Another scenario would be to plant drugs in a plane while the pilot is away filing a flight plan. After customs agents with drug-sniffing dogs find the drugs, the pilot is thrown in jail, and the airplane is confiscated. One pilot spent around \$20,000 to get out of jail and get his plane back. He got his plane back, but it was all cut up in little pieces! All this was cartel related.

I was warned not to hail a taxi off the street in Mexico. Some taxis take the passenger straight to the cartel for kidnapping and ransom. This happened to Tom Hicks, a Baptist missionary bush pilot who operated in Mexico for years, but who has just recently moved his plane back to Texas. Brother Hicks was abducted in a taxi, but fought like a cornered Wolverine and got away. Another time, Tom's wife was carjacked on the Texas side of the border, but she escaped as she ran away and threw the keys to the carjackers. Another time Brother Hicks landed at a remote runway in Mexico and saw 28 severed heads lining the runway. He just turned the plane around and took off.

But then we had to land in Veracruz for fuel and an overnight. Ever heard of the pucker factor? I told some of the Vera Cruz security guards then that this was God's plane, and that we were using it for God's work. If anyone messes with the plane or us, he will answer to God first and me later! We gave them all a Spanish John and Romans printed by Bearing Precious Seed. At least the text worked on my cell phone, and I was able to text Bro. Hicks the taxi number and the address of the hotel we were going to, also took pictures of cab driver. The next morning the plane was still there, no gas had been stolen, so I took off. Tom Hicks said, "Well done! You have done what a lot of pilots won't--Fly through Mexico! Call me if you need me." Guys like this are priceless!

Once we left Tapachula, near the southern border of Mexico, we had to land in San Salvador. A lady approached and asked if any of us were sick. I thought to myself that I probably had Ebola of the brain to fly through here, but I said, "No, I am well." I sure did not want to get quarantined in El Salvador. From there we were to fly over Nicaragua. We had to pay landing fees, customs fees, overflight fees, tips, etc. We had a problem then because El Salvador had failed to file our international flight plan through Nicaragua. There was some intense conversation between air traffic controllers and me, but we made a new flight plan in the air. (No chase planes.) While passing a very tall volcano on our left, it blew out a big puff of ash, and the strong winds aloft blew the plume above our flight path. We did not have to change our altitude—just kept on going. "Lord, you know what we need." Just past that on our right was a smaller mountain that had steam blowing continuously out its side. We went on to land in Costa Rica.

Now the plane is in a \$300 a month locked hanger. It would have been nice to have such a trip with no language barriers, gangs, beggars, cartels, thieves, or Customs officials. But the guys in the fiery furnace were delivered, and so were we.

I want to thank all the last-minute donors who together gave just what was needed for the trip. The plane ran well the entire 65 hours of flight time. Pre-take off prayers were short, "Lord, you know what we need." We are looking for a qualified bush pilot to do this new work. It's a tall order. Now, to finding a roof for my head and some Cabécar Indians with whom to share the Gospel.

Your thankful servant,

Les Paul Zerbe

SOURDOUGH SAM SEZ:

*There should be some
kind of reward for tagging
along on this trip!"*



P.S. Although we are in Costa Rica, we are continuing a ministry of encouraging Liberian preachers. Since our last letter, the household of Pastor Moses Kpah (Les' childhood friend) was put in quarantine for 21 days, after his young niece, whom he had taken into his home, died of Ebola. He and his family could no longer go to the grocery store, market, or church. Just a few days earlier, someone had sent us a special donation for food for needy pastors. The funds were available immediately to buy food, medicines and supplies for that family. God's timing! They did not come down with Ebola and are now out of quarantine. Thank you!

Do pray for Pastor Elvis Dissee, who lost his wife Mary from liver disease. She is survived by seven children. He pastors Repentance Baptist Church in Todee (where Les travelled last year by motorcycle) and is the founder of Bong Mine Theological Institute.