

## **Brazil - June 20-July 3, 2007**

### **Introduction**

We got to embark on a great journey through the country of Brazil with the San Francisco Bay Chorale. A group of singers from the Masterworks Chorale in San Mateo teamed up with some people from Peninsula Cantare to form a group of about 40 singers. When combined with spouses, the total was over 60! I'm glad we were finally able to go – we had planned a trip to Russia last summer, but there weren't enough people and they cancelled the trip. But this year, we had so many that we needed two buses!

Here are all the people that went – 63 in all

Bruce Huston  
Matthew Blum  
Janna Brendtro  
Bernard Buice  
Barbara Hawes Caldwell  
Ricky Caldwell  
Robert Caldwell  
Dina Dewes  
Roger Dewes  
Judy Felker  
Allan Fisher  
Ellen Fisher  
Patricia Forsyth  
George Gardiner  
Janet Gardiner  
Emery Gordon  
Janice Gunderson  
Peter Gunderson  
Dean Harman  
Lynn Harman  
Ronald Hodges  
Rachel Breed Janssen  
Robert Janssen  
Andrea Julian  
Betsy Koester  
Barbara Kresse  
Joseph Kresse  
Linda Litz  
Sharon Rice  
James Royer  
Pina Royer  
Carol Kurumada  
Ronnie Sue Leith  
Bryan Baker  
Marilyn Michaelson

Malcolm Catchatoorian  
Gaylon Babcock  
Juliet Mccomas  
Carolyn Alexander  
William Welch  
Elaine Welch  
David Bubenheim  
Debra Reiss-Bubenheim  
Max Capestany  
Grace Griffiths  
Pamela Eaken  
Robert Peterson Jr  
Janice Friesen  
John Friesen Jr  
Ellen Hill  
Stephen Hill  
Terri Homer  
Jo Cazenave  
Daniel Kitamura-Tintor  
Lory Kitamura-Tintor  
Merrill Scott  
Sue Scott  
Christine Niccoli  
Frank Niccoli  
Yukie Ozawa  
Carol Schick  
Al Schick  
Hannah Panger

I was a member of the Peninsula Cantare for several years when I lived in Foster City and Redwood Shores - one of my good friends and fraternity brothers Rob Janssen introduced me to the choir many years ago and I enjoyed singing with them. Later, after I moved on, I kept in touch with Rob and some of the Cantare members, and I sang with some of the Masterworks people in Brio (Lori and Bill).

## June 20

We were finally all packed, visas and passports ready, shots taken, medications in hand and music learned, to embark on our 2-week journey to South America. I had never been to South America, and was looking forward to a great combination of culture, good food, scenery, and fun. My alarm was beeping at about 3:45 am, so I could get my last few things together (there's always those last couple minute personal things that you can't pack until the last minute...) - and on my way to Rob and Rachel's place, I was so sure I had already forgotten some things... Rachel's dad took us to the airport, and checked in. The early morning adrenaline rush normally lasts for me for about an hour, then I crash

and start rapidly spacing out. But by then, with boarding passes in hand, we just had to get on the plane.

Flying to Miami just after sunrise, we climbed high over the fog-filled bay area, over the high peaks and lakes of the Sierra, the canyon country in UT (then I slept for a couple hours), then next thing I knew we were descending down into Miami. After so much planning and organization, at first it felt like the trip was never going to happen, but now it was hard to believe we were going!

After a couple hours in Miami, we crossed over to the TAM terminal to fly down to Manaus. A rather uneventful flight - I was trying to maximize my sleep so I'd be fresh the next day in Brazil. We didn't land until after about 12:30 midnight, and after long lines in immigration and customs, we were finally out by around 1:30. Fortunately, they had all our keys ready at the Tropical Manaus hotel, so we could just check in and sleep!

## June 21

There weren't any activities planned in the morning (thank goodness!), so Ron Hodges my roommate and I ended up sleeping in. Actually we planned to be up by about 10:00 for breakfast and to walk around the hotel, see the mini-zoo and go down to the river. But I guess the alarm was set for PM instead of AM, since we both didn't wake up until around 11:30. Oh well - we missed breakfast! We met Malcolm and Emory for lunch around noon and scavenged a few fries and half a sandwich for lunch (I wasn't really that hungry) - I then found out they had already done a sea-plane tour over Manaus, the famous meeting of the waters, and down the Amazon!

Around 1:00, we got on the coach for a Manaus city tour. It's a fairly small city, even though it is the capital of the state of Amazonas. It does have some pretty nice history. Our first "concert" in Brazil was singing Locus Iste in the beautiful Teatro Amazonas opera house. Built in 1896, it took 15 years to complete, and it's beautifully decorated with Italian frescoes, sculptures, and a ballroom with smooth wood floor. It was quite a useful thing to memorize at least a couple songs, so we could do a couple spontaneous performances like this! We spent a little time in the hall adjacent to the theatre, putting on slippers to not mar the beautiful wood floor - the individual pieces of the wood mosaic were precisely fitted together into a lavish mosaic. It was fun to "skate" across the smooth floor in the slippers - actually you had to be pretty careful! The heavenly view on the ceiling needed a good look as well - actually it was an optical illusion, the angels would appear to move when you looked at them from different angles!

Back at the main plaza and patronizing the locals for a map and ice cream, we headed down to the Manaus marketplace. The Mercado Adolpho Lisboa marketplace was also historic, built in 1882. The original market was under renovation, shops had been moved a little, but the smell of fish, nuts, local fruits and food filled the air as before. You could spend hours wandering the narrow shops of indigenous crafts - masks with piranha teeth and pirarucu scales were the most popular.

We took a short look at the church adjacent to the opera house - there was a service going on so we couldn't see much at the time, but we got a good preview of what the masses during the weekend would be like there. We headed back to the hotel, where we had a beautiful sunset reflected in the "infinity pool" - there is no edge and the water looks like it goes to the horizon. At the bar was some of the local beers and soft drinks, and I decided to try a can of Kuat (at least that was the name I could see on the label). The bartender didn't understand - maybe I was mispronouncing it or something. Then I saw in smaller letters "guarana", and I asked for that, and he immediately understood! Kuat was just the brand and guarana was the drink. It was quite good and re-energized me a bit. Turned out throughout the trip, we'd be drinking quite a bit of guarana soda. The herb contains a fair amount of caffeine, and back in the US, it is a key ingredient of a number of the "energy drinks". It also helped soothe the stomach, which proved to be quite useful a number of times.

Dinner was at the hotel, where we were treated to a show of some of the indigenous style music and dances - we enjoyed a buffet with Brazilian meats, Italian pasta and Japanese sushi, and sipping caiparinhas (a strong drink made with cane sugar alcohol and limes). Later in the show, some of us got dragged into the dance (the more the merrier), and at the end, we got to give back a little (or at least try)... we started out singing Locus Iste, but that was too "quiet and solemn", so they asked us to try Psalmo (which we hadn't memorized yet, but we knew there was a lot of "la, la, la"s, so it couldn't be that hard, right?). We made it about 1/2 way when half the choir was singing one verse and the other half another verse, so we gave up... a funny moment indeed, but it was our first try, and a few strong drinks only added to the laughter...

Back in the room, I was pretty tired and sleep came easily - my batteries and my camera's batteries needed a good recharge.

## June 22

We had a 2-day boat tour of the Amazon planned over the next couple days. This was one of the biggest things I was looking forward to my trip to Brazil - seeing some of the most famous ecosystems in the world. At the end of the rainy season, most everything was flooded, and the best way to see it was by boat.

We were treated to a lavish breakfast buffet at the hotel - all kinds of tropical fruits, some of the native fruits don't even have English translations to their names, but they were very good. The omelet / manioc bar and the Brazilian coffee was a good way to wake up as well!

The boats were waiting for us at the dock near the hotel around 11:00 - about 1/3 of us were on "the small boat" - the Igaratim-acu, and the rest were on the Helio Gabriel - we started cruising west on the Rio Negro toward an indigenous Indian village. It was a beautiful cruise on the serene waters. Much of the rainforest was still pretty virgin in this area outside the city.

We soon arrived at some small white-sand beaches - a small resort along the Rio Negro. The black waters actually covered most of the sand - the river was very high, being at the end of the rainy season - even all the picnic tables were all moved to the highest point so they wouldn't be washed away! It took us at least 1/2 hour to park, since they couldn't get the boats to stay put. They anchored the bigger boat first, then tied the smaller boat to the bigger boat, and had us hop over the railing onto the bigger boat, then down the gang-plank to the shore!

The chief of one of the Indian tribes greeted us in front of the meeting hall of the village. There were actually members of 3 different tribes - the Tucuias, Tucanos, and the Dessanos tribes. We were treated to about 1/2 hour of various dances and music, part of what can be a 24-hour greeting ceremony of when different tribes come into contact. The chief started out by shaking his spear in the 4 different directions and reciting some verses. The drums started rolling, the panflutes started whistling, the horns started playing, and the earthy tunes of a people from a faraway land and time came alive.

My camera was busy trying to record every moment and capture the sounds, but the 2.5 GB of memory would be used up far too quickly - some things would have to just be written in our memories.

After the dance, most of us took a hike up in the steamy rainforest to see some of the tribal customs of how the people lived off the land. The sap of the white brell tree could be burned to ward off mosquitoes, palm fronds could be used as rope, and this rope could be tied around your ankles to help people climb the coconut palms so that the prized fruit could be picked much easier. Every plant had its use - nothing was wasted. In a way I envy such a society - we live in a land of such extravagance and wealth these days that seemingly few people care about what they waste and what the impact of that is.

Back on the boats, we untied the smaller one from the bigger one and headed this time back downstream on the Rio Negro, where we passed a number of oil rigs - oil is one of the major components of the economy now in Manaus, after the once booming rubber industry declined. We passed downtown Manaus, looking at the beautiful dome of the opera house from far away. Soon afterward, we were heading down a smaller canal while being treated to a classic Amazon sunset. We pulled into the Rainha da Selva floating restaurant and small shop nearby. It was interesting doing a little shopping in the dark with the light of the screen from my camera, until about 10 minutes later they turned on the power!

One of the best ways to see the wildlife of the Amazon is to do a small boat ride and look for small crocodiles called caymans along the shores. We cruised for about an hour in 3 "canoes" each holding about 15 people, and we probably spotted about half a dozen of the little guys. Unfortunately, most of them were quite quick and we could only catch a quick glance, but it was interesting to see them in their natural habitat (seeing them behind a cage at the mini-zoo wasn't nearly as satisfying). On one of the other boats, the guide actually grabbed a baby cayman and passed it around on the boat!

Back at the floating restaurant, we were treated to a buffet with different sorts of tropical fruits and great meats - so far the food had been wonderful. We got back on our boats and headed just a little ways downstream from the restaurant, where we enjoyed the beautiful night sky. The first-quarter moon was pretty high overhead, and the stars of the Southern Cross and most of the southern constellations were quite visible. It'd be nice to see what it would be like with no moon - the southern part of the Milky Way is the most spectacular since you're looking toward Sagittarius and the center of the galaxy - you don't get a good view from the Northern hemisphere.

The sound of the wildlife all around us was almost deafening - thousands of frogs were croaking, crickets were chirping all around us, and probably millions of other bugs and buzzing. Fortunately, the mosquitoes weren't too bad - they peak around sunset but settle down after dark. Countless lightning bugs lit up around the tall grass.

### June 23

I actually had a pretty good night sleep on the boat - I wasn't sure how I would like the small mattress and rocking boat, but after a full day of sensory overload yesterday, I slept well. We were woken up pretty early for a morning boat ride through some of the flooded rainforest to have another look at the diverse wildlife. A few kids on canoes came by and showed us some of the local animals - monkeys, sloths, anacondas, and caymans, like they were their pets.

We got on some canoes, like those from last night, and headed deep into some of the side passages of the river. The wispy clouds lit up a coral pink color in the pre-dawn light, as we cruised along the glassy water. We passed some of the large water lilies - some of the circular leaves were a meter or two in diameter, and some even had bright yellow flowers. A couple jacanas stood on the lilies. It looked like you could get out and start jumping across the lily pads as well!

It was a beautiful morning and I had my camera all ready to try to capture as many of the moments as possible. I eagerly turned it on, and much to my dismay, the button didn't seem to work... hmmm - I hope the batteries weren't dead (I didn't have any with me at the time). Then I looked and saw the lens was open only about a millimeter, so it had tried to turn on. But then it was stuck. Shortly afterward the lens went back shut and the camera started making a rattling sound - sort of like when gears going opposite directions grate past each other. Hmmm - not good... and we were still at the beginning of the trip! The camera beeped "E18" and the screen went blank. This had happened before, and I remember in Yosemite trying to get an Ansel Adams shot of the sunset alpenglow on Half Dome, when the rattling sound started. It was like there was sand stuck in the lens or something (I had taken it through some mud caves outside San Diego shortly before that). I gave it to my friend and when he was fooling around with it, he dropped it by mistake. Hmmm - really not good... but if it was broken already, then it shouldn't really matter. But somehow miraculously that fixed it! It started working again, and I got my great shots of Half Dome. Maybe it shook some of the sand from the inner workings of the lens. So, here on the canoe in Brazil, I thought about trying the same thing. I gave it a

couple good thumps and shakes, and yes - it worked! I got my pictures along the Amazon, and my memories would be saved after all!

Many of the banks and islands in the river are cut with parallel river passages, just wide enough for the canoes to pass. I thought we were pretty lost in the flooded wilderness, as we cruised past monkeys, colorful birds, and interesting trees and ferns. Then all of the sudden, we popped out in another very wide river. We had actually crossed from the Rio Negro to the Solimoes (the water went from black to brown). We stopped for a while, and a few brave souls with their swim trunks (and some in their jeans) jumped in for a swim. Just as a few people got in the water, we could see some splashes out in the distance - hmmm, piranhas? sharks? crocodiles? they looked pretty big... a minute later, when they jumped again, we realized they were dolphins! And not just regular ones - these were pink dolphins! Also known as Boto or Amazon River dolphins, they are normally a grey color, and when they get excited, they become pink, as if they are blushing!

We cruised back to our boats on the canoes, just in time to enjoy a buffet breakfast of tropical fruits and cheese breads and juices. We were soon underway, cruising past some fazendas (local farms along the river banks), and watching some of the native people playing and doing laundry and cooking. They had probably been living the same way for hundreds of years - it was like a piece of living history.

Back on the Solimoes, we cruised downstream on the brownish water until way in the distance we could make out what appeared to be another large river merging from the left. This was in fact the Rio Negro, and the town of Manaus lay in the distance. A few minutes later, we could see that the river farther away was much darker - of course, "Rio Negro" means "black river". Eventually you get to the point where the two rivers merged. The "meeting of the waters" is a famous sight in the Amazon, where the Rio Negro and the Solimoes come together - the chocolate brown water of the Solimoes flows alongside the black water of the Rio Negro for almost 10 km before mixing. The acidic water of the Negro and the cooler water of the Solimoes form an undulating wavy boundary that appears surreal. Occasionally, small islands with green vegetation have formed right at the boundary, forming a very interesting combination of blue sky, green vegetation, and brown and black water. This spot where the waters meet is the official start of the Amazon River, which eventually flows a couple thousand more km to the Atlantic far to the east.

We slowly turned around and meandered back toward Manaus. Some of us tried making necklaces out of beads from some of the local nuts. It was nice checking back into the hotel, and relaxing in one of the pools. The Tropical Manaus hotel has 3 pools, and one of them is a wave pool like at an amusement park! A few of us were playing ball (or at least trying) while being sloshed back and forth. And then you could play in the waterfalls and see the giant turtles swimming behind the pool.

Our first official performance was at a Saturday evening mass at the Sao Sebastiao church near the opera house. The church was beautiful, with graceful sweeping arches,

domes, paintings, and sculptures, like a cathedral in Europe. But it was done quite tastefully and not overdone at all. Brazil has a large percentage of Roman Catholics, and many people attend mass. But the mass in this church was surprisingly not like the stereotypical solemn event that you'd expect. The priest was quite dynamic and the congregation was really energetic with singing, clapping and the call and responses. Of course the service was in Portuguese, but following along with the program wasn't too difficult, since the language is similar enough to Spanish that I could make out enough words to tell what was going on. Of course the accent is quite a bit different (sometimes d sounds like j and o sounds like u, etc, but the written form is similar.) We performed a few songs, for opening the service, for offering, and communion. It was great to feel like being part of the service, instead of just watching from a distance. This was the first time, feeling like not being a tourist, but as someone who can give a little something back.

Back at the hotel, we enjoyed a buffet dinner at the Karu Grill by the pool while watching some of the locals play "Tropical Bingo" - not sure how it was any different from regular bingo, but it sounded interesting... Afterward, since we enjoyed the infinity pool a lot a couple days ago, we had to go back for an 11 PM swim under the stars.

## June 24

This morning we were having a morning mass at the same church as last night, and then performing a full concert afterward. We enjoyed another wonderful breakfast buffet at the hotel - all you can eat tropical fruits (some that I couldn't even pronounce the names of, but they were very good), sweet breads, cheese bread, and of course Brazilian coffee. A cup of the coffee was probably good for most of the day!

Unfortunately, Ron my roommate developed a bit of a stomach illness overnight (it may have been linked to some of the food on the boats yesterday, since actually quite a few people caught the "Montezuma's Revenge" as well. I had it very slightly yesterday, but it passed quickly). Ron had to miss the concert in the morning, but after the extra sleep, he was feeling pretty good again.

We were at the church at 9:00 for a full Sunday mass, pretty similar to the one last night. But now with the sun lighting up the stained glass windows of the beautiful church, it added a heavenly light that wasn't there the night before. After the service, we performed a full concert -

### SACRED

*Locus Iste - Bruckner*

*Ubi Caritas - Durufle*

*Psalm 117 - Knauf*

*Salmo 150 - Aguiar*

### AMERICAN FOLK

*Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal - arr. Shaw-Parker*

*How Can I Keep from Singing - arr. Stroope*



*Shenandoah - arr. Erb*

### SPIRITUALS

*Ain't That Good News - arr. Dawson*

*Balm in Gilead - arr. Dawson*

### AMERICAN

*Gershwin Portrait (medley) (piano)*

### BRAZILIAN

*Ja Vem a Primavera! - Henrique de Curtiba*

*Samba-Lele - Brazilian folk song arr. Daniel Alfonso, Jr.*

It was quite a varied repertoire, and the audience really enjoyed it. We had a couple of the sacred works for more solemn occasions, and some American folk songs so we could share a bit of our culture with the Brazilians. Then, the Brazilians really enjoyed Psalmo 150 and Samba-Lele - since most of them probably knew those and could follow along (assuming our pronunciations were good enough!)

Lunch was on our own after the concert, so I decided to have a little walk over to the beach adjacent to our hotel. I was trying to get Malcolm or some other people interested to take a walk, but people had already split up. But I ventured down to the Rio Negro beach - a popular local's hangout, where they have a bunch of small restaurants and stands and kids can play in the water and enjoy themselves. It was interesting participating in some of the local culture - so many times on tours you get wrapped up in your own itinerary with sight-seeing that often tourists are aloof to the local way of life. Kids were flying kites, jumping into the river, and people were watching soccer on the TV's everywhere (getting ready for the big America's Cup coming up), and playing festive Latin music. I wanted to try some of the local cuisine, but I knew it probably wasn't safe to eat a lot of the local foods (since my system hasn't been adapted, and I didn't want to risk getting sick early in the trip), so I went with an ice cream bar for R\$2 (sure beat getting buffet lunch at the hotel for R\$56!)

Back at the hotel, I stopped for another look at the mini-zoo, watching the jaguar prowling back and forth, the monkeys swinging around (there was even one outside a cage which was far more interesting, maybe it was a local one!), and all the colorful birds - the toucans, macaws, and parrots.

We were getting ready to board the coach to head to the airport for our short flight to Brasilia the capital. We'd be in for quite a change - Manaus had been great for a few days, but we were ready to see something different. We had a couple snacks at the airport before boarding our domestic TAM flight to Brasilia. The flight was delayed probably about an hour (pretty good considering Brazilian air traffic control patterns recently), and we took off, heading south and east toward the capital city.

Soon after we took off, the meeting of the waters was clearly visible from the air (we didn't have to do the scenic flight for \$180 after all! - funny thing was Ron and I inquired about it a couple times after Malcolm and Emery went, and all the flights were full so we didn't get to go). We flew over the city of Manaus, the Amazon, and hundreds of tributary rivers snaking their way through the Amazonian rainforest. We had an amazing view of the sunset from the edge of space at around 40,000 feet - the last few colors of red and yellow disappearing to the black sky above.

As we were landing, we saw interesting patterns of lights below - almost like a large airplane shape. There were lights along the "fuselage" and "wings" of this giant "plane" and traffic flowed smoothly around. It turns out Brasilia is one of the most planned cities in the world. Built between 1957 and 1960 (there was nothing there but empty cerrado landscape before that), the city was engineered for efficiency. Lucio Costa was the principal urban planner and famous architect Oscar Niemeyer designed most of the buildings. The city was listed as a UNESCO world heritage site. Most streets had complete interchanges (no traffic lights needed), but where there were lights, they were like the Christmas trees in drag racing lanes. Five red lights on one side and 5 green lights lit up at different times, and it was always obvious how much longer the light was going to be red or green. Cars would anticipate the changing of the lights.

Once in Brasilia, we settled into our hotel and had a late dinner at one of the churrascarias nearby – the Churrascaria Fogo do Chao. We were starting to get used to eating lots of meat! And the dessert and Brazilian coffee (which they are famous for) was delicious. Only problem was I forgot how much caffeine was in the coffee, and it wasn't quite so fun to wake up at 3 am grinding my teeth as my body was still working off the caffeine.

## June 25

Today we did a city tour of Brasilia - we only had a few hours before we headed out to fly to Belo Horizonte. Originally, we were going to skip Brasilia and head straight, but the only flight available was around midnight, and we wouldn't get in until pretty late (assuming the flight would take off on time!) The time in the capital city was short, but 1/2 day was plenty to see the sights of the planned city. So once we got down the elevators (not sure if it was a bug or feature how they worked – they seemed to only go in 1 direction sometimes, making for a really long wait), we got on the coach for our tour.

Brasilia is much higher in elevation - over 1100 meters above sea level, resulting in a much cooler and drier climate than Manaus. The climate is cerrado, a semi-arid ecosystem which actually felt quite similar to the Bay Area. The sky was a vivid blue - the air was very dry during this time of year. In the summer, it's a different story, but now it was quite pleasant. Interesting thing to note - the average humidity was only around 10% before the city was developed, and after creating a lake (Lago Paranoa) and planting lots of trees, the humidity had gone up to around 25%.

The city felt very communistic, many of the buildings were stark and rectangular concrete - seeing the "twin towers" and many of the government buildings near one end of the "fuselage" felt like being in a "city of the future" from 30 years ago. Citizens of

the city have to pay up to 40 percent tax, but the standard of living is very high and the city was quite clean. But the bright white round dome of the National Museum and the hyperboloid structure of the Cathedral of Brasilia against a vivid blue sky was a sight to not be forgotten.

An interesting quote by Juscelino Kubitschek, one of the presidents of Brazil back in the 1960's was "Brasília is a new dawn in the History of Brazil". One of the visions of the city was that people could move from more "uncivilized" parts of the country like Rio de Janeiro, and move to the futuristic metropolis of Brasilia. A very ironic result came out of this vision - more people wanted to live in Rio, and they would actually fly to Brasilia for the workweek, then go back to Rio for the weekends! And when we went to Rio during the next few days of our tour, the reason became apparent quite readily.

We took a visit to the cathedral - with the statues of 4 apostles and a giant bell tower standing guard out front. Inside the cathedral was beautiful, clearly an inspired work by a great architect. Stained glass adorned the sweeping curved walls, while angels appeared to be ascending to heaven above the altar. We figured it would be a great place to check the acoustics, so we lined up and sang our customary "Locus Iste".

We blend in with some of the locals for lunch, doing a little shopping at one of the popular malls in the city. The 5-story shopping mall featured an ice rink at the bottom - kids were skating across the artificial ice effortlessly and really enjoying themselves! Going up the tiered escalators to about the 4th floor, passing portable McDonalds and Burger King stands, we went up to the food court. I tried my hand at ordering something simple in Portuguese (knowing the numbers was pretty useful). And I thought I was doing pretty good, when she gave the total and I handed her a R\$50 bill. She didn't accept it and instead asked some question. Hmm - what did she ask? I could make out a couple words (since it is similar enough to Spanish, but the accent was very different). She eventually (after much hesitation) took the R\$50, and I found out later that she was asking if I had something smaller (like a 10 or 20, but the ATM that I visited earlier only gave 50's).

I enjoyed a stuffed bread with carne and queso (beef and cheese), and afterward we went to one of the ice cream stands. I wanted just a small cone, and the guy asked which flavor - I decided to try something different - cupuacu (a Brazilian tropical fruit that was quite tart), and abacaxi (this one was smooth). Abacaxi is pineapple (I found this out later), but cupuacu didn't translate. They heaped two large scoops and I thought I was getting some bonus (I thought I was paying for a small, so of course I wanted them to heap it on!). When the guy handed me the cone, it was definitely far more than I could eat - and unfortunately, they charged by weight - I had 500 grams of ice cream - R\$9! Oops - oh well, I'll know for next time. The cupuacu was too tart to eat too much of so I ended up dumping about half of it (but I was so full already anyway).

It was a fun day seeing the city and enjoying some of the local food, but we were soon ready to head on a flight to Belo Horizonte. We didn't want to risk being late for the flight, and the airport was on the other side of town. Turns out the traffic moved so

smoothly that we got to the airport pretty early, and Jan and Bryan had us rehearse some of our concert set in the airport!

Our flight took off on time (actually a few minutes early - I guess Brasilia really had their act together!), and soon we were flying south toward Belo Horizonte. Our path took us over Brasilia, where we could see the structured design of the planned city, Lago Paranoa, and the triple arch of the Juscelino Kubitschek Bridge recently completed in 2002. It was a short flight to Belo Horizonte, which was nice, since we'd soon be on a 2-hour bus ride to Ouro Preto to the south.

The landscape around Belo Horizonte was quite different - deep limestone sinkholes and tall cliffs covered with trees begged some exploration. The doline karst topography consisted of deep sinkholes that drained to a network of underground caverns. In fact, some famous tourist caves are in the area and countless other smaller ones probably dot the landscape. While it would be fun to explore for a while, we would soon be on a bus heading further south to the colonial town of Ouro Preto high in the mountains.

We checked into a beautiful old rustic hotel in the mountains just outside the historic city, and enjoyed a buffet dinner at the hotel. It had been a long day and it was nice to check in for the night.

## June 26

Today was our big day touring Ouro Preto, then in the evening we planned to give a full concert at one of the churches. We enjoyed a breakfast buffet at the hotel, and soon we were ready to get on the bus to town. However, when we got back to the room after breakfast to get our things, we found the doorknob just spinning but not undoing the latch to open the door. It wasn't like the door was locked (hopefully it wasn't, since Ron left the key inside (we only had 1 for the 2 of us), and neither of us actually locked the door). But the door was locked (it locked automatically). Hmmm - we were locked out - and the bus was leaving in 1 minute! Fortunately, we explained to the front desk and got in just in time to grab our stuff and jump on the bus.

We headed to the bus station just at the edge of town, where we would get on smaller buses to reach the main town square - the Praca Tiradentes. Tiradentes, meaning "tooth puller" was named for freedom rebel Joaquim Jose da Silva Xavier, who revolted against the Portuguese in 1789. The narrow cobblestone streets of the city were too small to take our big bus to the town square. The rest of the day would be a walking tour. The historic city was built near the end of the 17th century, and was the focal point of Brazil's gold rush at the beginning of the 18th century. In fact, Ouro Preto means "black gold" - which was mined from the hills all around. Now, many of the churches are adorned with gold - the Pilar church alone has over 400 kg of gold adorning its altar and sculptures.

The narrow streets followed the contours of the mountainous landscape - if you thought the streets of SF were steep, then you need to visit Ouro Preto. The elevation was quite high - probably around 1,200 - 1,300 meters above sea level. It was cool and a bit misty in the mountains, as is usual. We could just make out the gravity-defying angled rock of

Pico de Itacolomi in the distance, rising to 1,722 meters. This strange rock served as a prominent landmark to help the original settlers navigate the mountains.

We started with a short guided walking tour starting at the Aleijadinho status in the town square. Aleijadinho was one of the famous sculptors who had designed much of the ornate baroque style sculptures in the churches. Amazingly, he was quite handicapped - leprosy had begun to cripple his limbs, and eventually he lost his fingers and toes. Later on "O Aleijadinho" came to mean "Little Cripple". Doing most of his work at night, he still managed to produce some of the finest carvings in Brazil.

Our first stop was at the Igreja NS do Carmo where we got a history lesson about the city and how it boomed during the gold rush. In fact, at one time, silver was worth more than gold, since gold was so abundant! Many other minerals were mined, and almost every other shop featured giant carvings from amethyst, citrine, quartz, or other exotic minerals. Unfortunately this church was under renovation and the doors were shut. Down one of the side streets we visited the Hotel Alberge Ouro Preto, then around the corner was the beautiful Igreja do Sao Francisco de Assis. We peeked inside for a quick look, giving us a glimpse of what it would be like tonight when we sang in that church.

Near the church was one of the large open-air markets, like a giant flea market of soapstone sculptures. Sculptures, vases, boxes, and other ornate figurines all carved out of the smooth but delicate stone filled the shelves as far as you could see. And the rates were quite reasonable, and bargaining was all part of the game (some figures didn't even have prices - you negotiated a price). We picked up four small jewelry boxes for R\$10 (about 5 dollars).

We finished the tour back at the Praca Tiradentes, where we broke off into smaller groups to go out on our own to explore. We had some rough directions to the Matriz de NS do Pilar church, the famous one with the most gold inside. It was only a few blocks away, but we had to walk one block up a 30 degree angle, then one block down a 30 degree slope, etc, until we finally thought we reached the church. It was pretty old, but looked interesting for exploration. But the heavy wooden doors were locked tight - hmmm maybe this one was closed for renovation too? When we got the map back out, we realized we were at the wrong place, and the Pilar church was still a couple blocks away. Looking up the hill, we saw an elegant church up on a steep hill overlooking much of the town. Wow - what a location! We saw a couple other people in front, looking around, but not going inside. Why not? I hope it wasn't closed too... We trekked up the steep cobblestone hill to the front door, and again all we saw were some heavy wooden locked doors. Hmmm - the book said it should open at 12:00, so it should be open by now. Maybe they were late?

Well it turned out we were at the wrong place again - the map was 180 degrees out of whack, and we went 2 blocks uphill when we should have gone 2 blocks downhill! We were at the De Paula church about 4 blocks from the Pilar church. Again, that doesn't sound far, but virtually climbing stairs the whole way for 4 blocks made it a bit of an ordeal! The church we were at didn't open until later in the afternoon, so we decided to

hoof it back down the hill. The Pilar church was actually quite famous and all the locals knew where it was and could help us with some directions (charades were easier than using broken Spanish / pseudo-Portuguese to communicate). When we finally arrived at the church around 12:45, they asked for a "boleto". Hmmm - boleto - I think that is "ticket". You needed a pass to get in. For R\$4 each, we got our tickets and entered the beautiful sanctuary.

I'm not sure if I've ever seen so much gold in one place in my life before! Everything was covered in ornate carvings and gold! Every square inch of the altar and the area surrounding the altar was adorned with sculptures of angels, cherubim, Biblical scenes, saints, flowers, and seashell-like carvings. This church, built in 1731 was the pinnacle of the rococo period of the Baroque era - known for its extravagant, over-the-top style of design.

This church, like many of the others, had a second set of fake doors just inside the main doors (I thought maybe these were the original doors and the current doors were new, but this was part of the style). Then the main sanctuary contained a set of side chapels (all with their own rather ornate altars). Then the ceiling and domes overhead were painted with scenes from heaven - angels kept watch over the congregation as they worshipped and prayed and knelt on the kneeling-boards behind the pews. Kneeling in a prostrate position before God and listening to His word seemed to honor and revere Him more than just sitting in a comfortable chair listening and singing along with words projected from computer screens, as is so common in comfortable American churches these days.

The Pilar church, like many of the others, was built in the late 1770's. Ouro Preto lay claim to over 23 churches - many of them ornate wooden structures. Amazingly, all of them were original - none of them ever burned (even though for hundreds of years, people used candles for lights). As we were meditating in the church, we ran into one of the guides, who accompanied us for lunch later on.

We had lunch at a nearby cafe - the Cafe Gerais, one of the popular local hangouts. It was interesting to hear a more personal side of the guide and how she was getting ready to teach a English class at a local college (she actually had to leave a little early to not be late). The soup and sandwiches (and dessert afterward) was delicious! And we ran into some other people from our group there as well! They were dining at one of the tables in the back. And as a bonus, Bryan asked for the key to the piano and provided us with a little bit of lunchtime jazz for entertainment! Even some of the locals along the streets and construction workers took a break to listen in.

After lunch, a few of us got a bit adventurous and hired a cab to take us to another interesting church about 3 km from the square. This church, the Capela do Padre Faria, was one of the oldest, actually one of the very first in the mountains of Ouro Preto. Just behind the cemetery, the slanted rock of the Pico de Itacolomi loomed overhead. I feel like the trip back and forth to this church was as interesting as the church itself. The cab somehow managed getting up and down the 30 degree cobblestone streets at breakneck speeds (I guess these drivers do it everyday). It was like being on a roller coaster but

with no safety bar to hang onto! I think we were skidding the whole way down the hill too.

After the cab dropped us back off at the Praca Tiradentes, we walked around a little more. We noticed a side door of the NS do Carmo was now open. This was the church under renovation that we didn't get to see earlier, so I wondered if we could sneak a quick peek. Indeed, they were doing a wonderful job. Part of the floor and gold-plated altar looked almost new, and workers were polishing the rest of the floor and renovating some of the other fine carvings in the back of the church. We were only there for a minute or two, and as soon as we left, they shut the side door!

We also decided to give the mineral museum a quick look. It displayed some of the geology and history of the mining in the state of Minas Gerais (means General Mines). Seeing some of the scenes of how the slaves were put to hard work digging the tunnels and mining the gold, gems and diamonds later on. Unfortunately the last bus was leaving at 4:00 to take us back to the hotel, so we only had about 20 minutes in the museum.

Back at the hotel, we changed quickly to get ready for our evening concert at the Sao Francisco church. I was really looking forward to performing in such a beautiful venue - the full name was the Igreja de Sao Francisco de Assis, built in 1766. The self-taught Antonio Francisco Lisboa (later given the name Aleijadinho, meaning "little cripple") carved all the outside artwork on the church himself. As a bonus to our performance inside, there was to be a Brazilian choir that was going to join us as well - what a treat! We pulled into the bus station at the edge of town, and then we walked to the church. We could see the sunset behind the beautiful Igreja de Santa Efigenia dos Pretos - built with gold from a mine owned by an African tribal king, who had been sold as a slave to work in the mine.

It was nice to be at the church a little early and actually to take pictures (we weren't allowed to take pictures in most of the churches in Ouro Preto, but since we were performing in this one, it was OK). My camera was doing its weird thing again - making that strange rattling sound when the lens opened only a millimeter or two. Hmm - not again! But fortunately after a couple good thumps it was working again. We warmed up, figured out how to arrange the electronic piano (we didn't expect to have a piano, so this was a bonus), and figured out how to arrange ourselves along the edge of the altar. Every church was different and it always took us a while to figure out the best way to line up.

It was a full house - people even standing in the back. The Brazilian choir performed a few numbers - including some classical works, a movement from Handel's Judas Maccabeus, and some Brazilian works. Their voices were so pure and clear - and so energetic! Afterward, we got up and performed most of the numbers from our program. Then at the end, the choirs combined, and we got to sing 2 pieces together - the Locus Iste and the Psalmo 150. It was a great experience being able to perform together - we both did these pieces from memory (I was wondering at first if we learned them the same way, but we did!). The voices blended so well, and again the amount of energy was great. I just wish there was a recording!

After the concert and getting pictures, the director of the Brazilian choir handed Bryan a gift - at first he didn't know what it was. It was like a bow (for a bow and arrow), then there was a small rock and another small stick. Hmm - what do you do with this? Was it like a giant slingshot for firing the rock? No, it was a berimbau, a native Brazilian instrument. You strike the string with the small stick, making a twanging sound. Then to change the pitch, you press the stone against the string in different locations, changing the vibrating length of the string, which raises the pitch. The Brazilian director gave a quick demo, which was quite rhythmic and made you almost want to dance to it. Then Bryan tried it and sort of figured it out - I guess it would take some practice... when he first tried it, it just went "thud, thud"...! It was a great gift - and had a special meaning. Only thing was how to get that thing on the airplane home? It was probably 4 feet long!

We headed down a side street a few blocks and enjoyed dinner at the nearby Casa dos Contos - it was a great day not to be forgotten. We walked back to the Rodoviaria where we got back on the main bus back to the hotel and for a good night sleep.

## June 27

Today was a day to unwind from all the action the last couple days and take a bus ride down the countryside to the big city of Rio de Janeiro. It was supposed to be about a 7 to 8 hour bus ride. We were scheduled to give a performance in Rio around 6:00 that night, and we didn't want to be late, so we had an early breakfast buffet at the hotel before hitting the road.

I wasn't able to charge my camera batteries overnight, since the electricity wasn't compatible. Even with my adaptor, I couldn't get the lights to come on indicating the batteries were indeed charging. Ron was also a bit annoyed he couldn't get his hair dryer working - most hotels indicate a "110V" above the outlets that are indeed 110 and not 220 (this hotel didn't have any "110V" stickers on the outlets). And he didn't want to risk blowing out his hair dryer that he brought. This was also the only hotel without a hair dryer inside, and even with every combination of adaptor and plug, he couldn't manage to fit the plug (one prong was just a little bit too wide). Bummer - but that's one of the interesting lessons of overseas travel.

The road to Rio was long, but the highways were actually in pretty good condition. I originally was comparing the roads of Brazil to other countries like Mexico or India, where there are no real "freeways" and the top speeds were about 40-50 km/h. We made pretty good time, winding our way down the mountains. Far below, we could even make out where the ocean was - a blanket of fog was covering the sea in a carpet of white. It was like looking down on San Francisco.

We were ready to turn on another freeway when all of the sudden - traffic jam! Traffic was stopped in both directions - hmmm. Maybe my original traffic fears would come true. After waiting about 5 minutes, we soon found the source of the traffic jam. Three large trucks, carrying enormous tanks were coming down the road. Each tank was the entire width of the road (probably 3 lanes wide), so for safety, they were taking up the



whole road. It was actually quite amusing to watch. As soon as the trucks with the tanks passed, traffic was flowing smoothly again.

Soon afterward, we turned into the Fartura restaurant for lunch. We saw the first 4 letters of the sign before seeing the rest of it, and that generated quite a few laughs! It was one of the popular "kilo" restaurants of Brazil - a buffet where you pay by the weight of your plate. My stomach wasn't quite feeling 100%, so a couple hundred grams was good for me before I felt stuffed. But the food was quite good. We were warned at this point to "not eat any salads", since often the lettuce and tomato was washed in water that was not clean. You were actually more likely to get sick from fresh vegetables than meat. I imagine the couple vegetarians we had in our group were having a rough time, since it was either Brazilian meats (which they are famous for), or vegetables!

Afterward, a couple people took a little walk around the swan lake (there were a few white swan-shaped paddleboats you could cruise around in), visit the organic garden, or watch the parakeets in a big cage. What was most interesting for me, however, were the numerous termite mounds all around the countryside. Some of these mounds were probably 6 or 8 feet tall, and who knows how many bugs were in each one. Each mound was a maze of tunnels in every direction, and the nest extended far underground too - the mound was actually made from the excavations of the dirt from underground. I wasn't about to try kicking one...

The landscape was changing around us, and we could tell we were getting close to Rio, when we could make out the shapes of the granite mountains all around us. It was kind of like when you get near Yosemite and the mountains get more rugged with large exposed granite slabs. In fact, Rio is a lot like Yosemite, but on the beach. Instead of granite domes with meadows in between, the city is granite domes with beautiful white-sand beaches and cities (and favelas) in between.

We reached the Candelaria church just before 4:00, giving us a bit of time to start getting ready for our performance. It was nice to have some extra time, and the church was quite beautiful. Again, it was nice to (legally) take pictures of the ornate marble work and carvings and paintings all around us. It was like being in a part of heaven. However, for me, my stomach was feeling even further from 100% at this point (the long bus ride didn't help, and it wasn't feeling so great since lunch). I even felt like a bit of a fever was coming on, but it would come and go. I thought I should be fine for the evening, then I'd get a good night sleep and take some medicine and I should be fine.

We rehearsed for about an hour, where I had to sit a couple times since it was quite hot and stuffy inside. The acoustics were wonderful and the design of the church was exquisite. I think the adrenaline of such an experience kept me going, even though my stomach condition was sinking fast. We were almost ready to perform, and we put on our suits with black pants, long sleeve white shirts, blue, yellow, and green ties (to match the colors of the Brazilian flag), and thick black coats (with buttons fastened). By now, it was pretty hot and I was wondering why we needed to button our coats (it was great in Manaus to skip the coats altogether!).

We made through the first third or so of the program, when all the sudden I started feeling faint. I didn't lock my knees or anything - I just started feeling really hot and stuffy. I had to quickly bow out (I was near the back so this was hardly noticed), and head to the bathroom. A few minutes of letting my body clean itself out really helped. After a couple glasses of water and sitting for about 15 minutes (the middle third of the program) I was ready to go back on. I wanted to be able to sing the Gershwin jazz part at the end (plus whatever encores the audience asked for). I just didn't want to get sick again.

I felt fine, actually quite good, and really enjoyed singing the rest of the concert. We had a standing ovation, and probably did an extra 3 or so songs for an encore. I'm really glad they really liked it - especially the *Ja Primavera* and *Psalm 150*. After the concert, we headed to dinner. This time I was hoping for something simple, like a nice bowl of soup or something - anything but meat! But of course, since Brazil is famous for its meats (almost as much as Argentina or Texas!), we headed to the *Curretao*, another *churrascaria* (Brazilian BBQ!). We were bombarded with skewers of all different meats from chicken to lamb to filet mignon to chicken hearts. This was wonderful in the beginning, but after about 5 days, I'm ready for something different (I guess we're pretty spoiled in the Bay area to have so many culinary choices). But since my stomach wasn't quite back to 100%, I wasn't ready for more heavy salty meat (and I'd probably have to skip the Brazilian coffee too - bummer). I asked for the menu choices (they normally don't give menus, since they pass the meats around and you just take what you want), and a nice bowl of vegetable soup was one of the best meals I had in a while!

## June 28

My roommate again wasn't feeling so well overnight, and he had to get up early to go to the bathroom - and of course woke me up in the process. It turned out to work out for the best, however, since when I peeked out the window, a brilliant red glow came through the shutters. We had a great view from the 16th floor of the luxurious *Othon Palace* hotel right on Copacabana beach. I rubbed my eyes and found the most spectacular sunrise over Rio de Janeiro, all of its granite peaks, beaches, and towns. A classic postcard sunrise! The morning sky was lit up a deep red over the horizon, lighting the undersides of the high clouds passing overhead. We didn't have to be up for a couple more hours, so after a bunch of panoramic photos, I quickly dozed back to sleep.

We headed down to the 3rd floor for another wonderful buffet breakfast - my stomach was mostly better, but I still had to cut back a little. The tropical fruits and sweet breads were delicious and easily digested. I didn't want to risk any uneasiness today - this was one of the most anticipated days of the trip.

Rio de Janeiro actually means "January River", since it was discovered by the Portuguese explorer Gaspar de Lemos in January 1502. Back then, "river" was a general term for a large body of water, and when Guanabara Bay was reached, it was called January River. Rio was the capital of Brazil until recently, in 1960, the capital was moved to Brasilia.

We got on the bus and headed over to the famous Corcovado Mountain with the picturesque Cristo Redentor statue on top. I noticed pretty soon it seemed like we were driving on the wrong side of the street... we found out some of the major streets in Rio switch directions of traffic where both lanes follow the direction of rush-hour traffic. I think they should do that on 101 sometimes back home!

Corcovado is probably the most famous postcard view in all of Brazil, and we were blessed with beautiful skies and just a few high clouds. It had been foggy recently, and often people go all the way to the top and just see the inside of a cloud. But not today! We boarded the cog railway and started cruising up the 710 meter peak. It was like a ride in Disneyland - a small band was singing in the train car as we headed up past monkeys, jaguars, dwarves, and other woodland creatures (all make-believe, of course).

This mountain and statue had been visible the whole time in Rio so far, and in fact, just a couple weeks after our trip, on 07/07/07, it was voted as one of the 7 "new wonders of the world". In Rio, signs for "Vote en Cristo" were all around, as part of a propaganda war to get the statue placed up there in importance with the pyramids in Egypt of the Great Wall of China. Personally, I think the statue is in a great location, but the statue itself is actually quite plain. The amount of work put in the churches in Ouro Preto with all the gold probably took far more time and effort to construct.

Suddenly, the trees opened up and the view of Rio stretched out from horizon to horizon. All the famous beaches including Copacabana, Ipanema, and Leblon, Sugarloaf peak (also known as Pao de Acucar), Guanabara bay, Maracana stadium (one of the largest football stadiums in the world), Tijuca national park (a beautiful nature preserve right in the city containing native rainforest and its signature 1100 meter Tijuca peak), and Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas the large lake in the city.

It was like being on top of the world - the whole city at our footsteps. Christ the Redeemer had his hands spread out indicating love over the city - and of course Christ had His arms spread with love in a similar way on the cross. Unfortunately, we were on a pretty tight schedule, only giving us about 1/2 hour at the peak. But I did manage to get a picture of my arms spread under Christ's arms so it looks like we are both flying over the city (like in Titanic)! Many of us were wearing our "SF Bay Chorale" t-shirts, and started to collect under the statue to sing a little. Time was short, but we managed to perform a couple songs. It was quite a blessing for the other tourists and for us too!

We had to line up to get on the next train back down and we had to wait in a waiting area behind the statue without much of a view - bummer. But it was still really worth it. My ears started popping as we headed down the steep hill toward the station at the base of the mountain. They must have some good brakes!

Back on the bus, we continued our tour of the city, circling the Lagoa Rodrigo, passing one of the largest shopping malls in town, and heading over toward the beach. It was a vision of paradise, the turquoise waters and white-sand beaches. Right next to the beach were granite slabs running straight to the ocean. It was soon like driving around

Olmstead Point in Yosemite with the road cut straight from the rock. Actually, many parts were like combining the best of Yosemite and Big Sur – I just wished we had more time for some photography.

Around the corner was the beautiful Ipanema beach, and just next to it was the ritzy Sheraton hotel. Rio is quite a city of contrasts - one of the largest favelas was right across the street from the fancy hotel. About 1/5 of the people in the city live in favelas. These shanty towns have been in existence over 100 years, when war veterans and freed slaves came to Rio with no place to live. Many of the favelas are practically outside of any government jurisdiction and law. Police actually tend to avoid the favelas now, forming a vicious cycle of violence and drug trade. Well-armed and violent street gangs rule in the favelas. Interestingly, since the hilly terrain was the last area anyone wanted to build in Rio, that is where the favelas developed - poor people would use whatever materials were available - cinder blocks, wood, and even pieces of garbage, to build elaborate towns.

The surf on the beaches was a little big today, but a few hardy surfers were out riding the waves. Most people were just walking, enjoying the sand, the black and white waves in the mosaic tile pavement, the sun, and ice creams and local snacks from the stands along the street. The beach ended abruptly against the rocky point that divides Ipanema and Copacabana beaches. A historic fort was built on the point – cannon blasts would sound periodically, and it was open for tours. I wish we had another day to see the sights, but time was short.

A lot of people decided to get off at one of the jewelry factories near Ipanema beach and get a ride back from there. Brazil is famous for gems and jewelry, and the H. Stern factory is world famous. (I wonder if a R. Limbaugh factory is going to open to compete with H. Stern...) However I'm not so interested in jewelry (at least not yet), and I had already seen a big diamond factory (the Capris diamond factory in Israel) a few years ago.

So while the rest of the group was out looking at jewelry, we headed back to the Othon Palace, where a group was thinking about heading over to Sugarloaf. I was actually curious about the hang gliding opportunity at Sao Conrado. You take a bus up to Pedra Bonita, a 500 meter granite rock, strap on a big wing, jump off, and land on the beach. (tandem, of course for beginners). I was torn - go hang gliding, or up to Sugarloaf? They were both like once-in-a-lifetime adventures. But when the front desk called the hang gliding outfit, they said the winds were too turbulent and nobody was going out... there was a weather system on its way in. Oh well. Now, with our minds made up, we went down the street for lunch at the Comendare Italian restaurant (no Brazilian BBQ this time), and grabbed a taxi toward Sugarloaf (Pao de Acucar)

It was a fairly short drive to the eastern end of town, where we were dropped off at the cable car station for Sugarloaf by the Praca Gen. Tiburcio. The weather indeed was starting to come in - clouds had already covered some of the nearby peaks. Hmmm - I hope the view is still clear from Sugarloaf... Galen, Juliet, Joe and Emory and I got our tickets and soon were on the gondola heading up to the 220 meter first hump of Sugarloaf

Mountain - Morro da Urca. A few rock climbers were on one of the routes of Morro da Babilonia just behind us - Rio is a unique city like I said before, like Tuolumne meadows in Yosemite right on the beach and in the city!

We walked around a bit, taking the path toward the second cable car to the summit of Sugarloaf itself. A few clouds were swirling below the top of the 396 meter summit, rising like a vertical loaf of bread (hence the name Sugarloaf). I stopped to take a few pictures and thought I had fallen behind a bit, when I saw the second cable car was almost full and about to leave. When I got on, I ran into Malcolm! There'd be no way he would miss this! (I wonder if he asked about hang gliding too...). We passed through some of the thin clouds, as the views continued to open up of Rio all around us. No roads or paths head up to the top - if you want to get up on your own, you have to rock-climb.

Once on top and we got off the crowded cable car, I couldn't find Emory and Rob and Galen and Juliet - hmmm - maybe they missed it and took the next one? The view was amazing, and it took a few minutes just to drink it in before I even thought to reach my camera (I hope my camera doesn't do the rattling thing this time!) The summit was like an isolated ecosystem - since the only way up (or down) was by cable car. A couple dozen squirrel monkeys were swinging in the trees on top (and looking very cute), and even a bunch of desert cactus were growing around the sides of the rock. It was turning into a beautiful sunset - the sun was playing with the clouds coming in, while a few clouds passed below us. The rest of our group showed up - they were on the next cable car and we got our photos (with a couple cute ladies that Malcolm managed to pick up on the way).

Clouds capped many of the lower mountains to the east, and Corcovado stuck high through the clouds to the west, with the Christ facing us and His arms spread eternally in love. I could make out our hotel far away on Copacabana (it was one of the 2 high-rise hotels on the beach), and the cars were like ants on the streets.

It was getting time to head back, and we were soon on the cable car, passing through the clouds on the way down (made a great video!) to Morro da Urca, and then back to Praca Gen. Tiburcio at sea level. My ears popped on the way down a couple times - it was a quick trip. But it was definitely well worth it. Only thing that could top the cable car ride to Sugarloaf would be a cable car up to Half Dome! The taxi driver was still waiting for us at the parking lot, and soon we were back at the Othon Palace. All of this for just about R\$20 for the cab and R\$35 for the cable car = about \$27 US. Well worth it.

Back at the hotel, we had a couple hours to kill before dinner. It was already dark (and Rio is one of the most dangerous cities in the world, up there with Baghdad and Kabul with 80 killings a week (and far more robberies and theft). Being such a city of contrasts (like the favela next to the ritzy Sheraton), rich and poor butt heads quite often. In fact, one girl in our group had her diamond necklace brutally stolen by a gang of kids (they teamed together, made a distraction, and managed to slip away into a crowd with her necklace. I decided to stay back at the hotel and catch up on email (since it had already been a week) and back at home it's hard to go a couple hours without staying in touch (I

guess, since I had so many other things on my mind on this trip, I felt like I didn't miss my Internet connection and cell phone so much).

We got on the bus to head to the Clube Plataforma, where we were treated to another wonderful dinner. I was able to enjoy most of it, but still had to lay off the red meat. I felt like I had become a vegetarian now, but at least there were plenty of non-meat choices this time. Right after dinner, we headed upstairs to a theatre where we enjoyed an extravagant samba dance show. It was like a little taste of what Carnival was all about. People knew how to party in Rio. Sipping a couple caiparinhas and watching the beautiful feathered costumed dancers was definitely a treat for the senses. Everything from scantily clad samba dancers to dancers buried in enormous brilliant feathers, and a lady juggling a soccer ball on her head probably for 10 minutes without the ball touching the floor. Then different kinds of music and rhythm - a capoeira dance where acrobats would fly through the air upside down, an Argentinian bola dancer with a guy swinging a pair of balls on strings and hitting the floor in a frenzied dance - I just hoped the balls wouldn't ever fly off for any reason!

It was definitely a day of sensory overload and we weren't done until after 11:00. I was glad to get back to the hotel and relax a bit. The rain was coming down quite heavily - was quite a surprise since we had beautiful weather the whole trip so far. On Sugarloaf earlier, we were watching it come in, and now it was here. It made for good sleeping weather.

## June 29

It was pretty foggy when I woke up - most of the mountains were covered. Glad I got the good pictures yesterday at sunrise. Today we planned to head to a small colonial town a couple hours outside the town, do some sightseeing and give a concert.

We had our usual breakfast buffet at the hotel - I was feeling pretty good by now, having mostly recovered from a couple days ago. It was nice to have a little walk on Copacabana beach, watching the heavy surf pounding on the smooth white sand. A bunch of sand sculptures had been built, honoring the Pan American games, which were about to kick off in Rio in the next couple weeks. Elaborate sculptures of the Maracana stadium and of different sporting events had been constructed all out of sand, and you could pay to have your picture taken in the center of the sculpture (I guess that was how they made their money).

We were amazingly on time at 10 AM (our group had been pretty good the whole trip, always being ready on time. Another bus next to us was just leaving, and their group was supposed to meet and leave at 8 AM, so they were 2 hours late!) We headed north, about 80 km out of town, the narrow and windy roads heading high up in the mountains and clouds. It was a bit foggy and misty and much cooler in the small town than in Rio yesterday. Apparently in the summer, a lot of the locals head up in the mountains where it can be at least 20 degrees cooler.

Petropolis is a small colonial, German style town. It was interesting to see classic European architecture in Brazil - quite a culture shift from the hustle and bustle of metropolitan Rio. Our first stop was a museum which had once been Dom Pedro II's palace when he was emperor of Brazil. Dom Pedro II was the last emperor of Brazil when it was a monarchy. He took the throne at the young age of 5, and ruled until his death in 1891 - a reign of almost 60 years! After Dom Pedro's death, Manuel Deodoro da Fonseca became the first President of Brazil, and the monarchy was abolished.

Visiting the palace was like visiting one of the palaces in England - with ornate furniture, chandeliers, coats of arms, artwork, and most famously, the crown jewels. Definitely a lot of eye candy and sensory overload as my mind was trying to process it all. I couldn't imagine living in a place of such extravagance, but I guess when you are emperor, you can have whatever you want.

We took a little stroll around town, passing the Municipal theatre, some of the parks, a nice cathedral (but we just got to see the heavy locked wooden doors in front, since I think it was under renovation), and some restaurants. It was starting to rain a little, so we ducked into a pizzeria for lunch. We were tired of buffets and just wanted to order some food, so we got a couple pizzas. The food was good, but service was slow. Then came 3 (minor) fiascos - one pizza never showed up but we were charged for it, an extra fruit drink was added that we didn't order, and an extra banana split was added... trying to explain to them their mistakes with a few phrases from a guidebook proved challenging. I think we ended up just getting ripped off and eating some of the charges and moving on instead of fighting it. Hmmm - maybe we should just stick with the buffets next time...

We headed to the municipal theatre and started warming up for our performance. It was interesting to tour backstage in a real theatre, and outside the US, many of the areas that should have been roped off were open (in the US, they would probably be "dangerous or off-limits", so it was fun to explore). We knew the music pretty well by now (probably much of it was memorized now), and we just brushed up a few key areas. We decided to cut a couple parts that the other audiences didn't really care for as much, and added a couple opportunities for encores at the end (the audiences always enjoyed the upbeat spirituals and Psalmo!)

The mayor of the town and his wife were there for the performance at the Municipal Paulo Gracindo theatre, which opened a choir festival in Petropolis. It was cool to see a lot of culture in the city - and their interest in music. It kind of reminded me of my choir tour in college, where we went to Austria and Hungary over spring break. After our performance, a Brazilian choir performed a few numbers, and at the end, we performed Locus Iste and Psalmo together. Their voices were so clear and pure - they blended amazingly well and the ancient but timeless harmonies were brought to life once again.

We took a ride outside town and enjoyed dinner at the Churrascaria Rio Sul, which was next to a beautiful lake reflecting an exquisite palace on the far side. Definitely a memorable moment, and I was just starting to enjoy the meats again! For about 20 people of our group, this was their farewell, since they weren't going on to Iguacu falls.

June 30

This was our last day in Rio - we enjoyed breakfast at the hotel and soon afterward were on the bus headed to Rio de Janeiro's Galeao airport. We were running a bit late and it felt like we might even miss our flight. But based on the experience of TAM airlines, the flight would probably be delayed as usual. Actually, the flight was delayed a bit, then a little longer, and again. Then they said it was grounded indefinitely. Hmmm - but why? Of course they never tell us. Or they might make a short announcement (in Portuguese of course), which didn't have any useful information.

We eventually heard the cause of the delay, which was because of "inclement weather conditions" - whatever that meant. I thought the forecast was for sunny weather the next couple days. Maybe mismanagement of the airlines (there had been problems going on for several months with the airlines in Brazil with air traffic control - and they could always use weather as an excuse). Hmmm - this wasn't good. And for the rest of us, this was the part of the trip we were looking forward to the most. We had to start making contingency plans - what if we couldn't get out until tomorrow? What if there was an airline strike and we were stranded? How long would it take on a bus? We later found out the whole airport was closed because of fog. Apparently, a weather system had just gone through, and when the skies cleared quickly overnight, the air cooled quickly, blanketing the whole area in dense fog.

Fortunately, we got the announcement we had all been waiting for, and they said the flight was going to be leaving in 15 minutes! Back on track - woo-hoo! We were going to Iguacu falls - finally! Don't need to worry about contingency plans or long bus rides! We were soon in the air, heading south and west toward the falls. It was clear skies the whole way - what fog? There was not even a hint of fog or clouds or anything! Apparently, it had all burned off around 1:00 and everything was clear. Then, as a bonus, since the pilot had pity on our ordeal, flew over the falls, dipping the left wing and giving everybody postcard aerial views. Then he turned around, dipping the right wing and giving the rest of us a view. A great rainbow arced across the entire horseshoe of the falls, and we could even see a helicopter in the distance, giving tourists a spectacular view of the natural wonder up close.

We were greeted with a band at the airport, a group of guys hitting drums and cowbells and dancing. Of course, Malcolm had to join the action for a moment! We claimed our luggage and were soon on our way through downtown Iguacu Falls, then to our hotel. We had to make one souvenir stop on the way. I was kind of wishing we could skip the stop and maximize our time at the falls. But this was no ordinary souvenir shop. It was like a museum - amethyst crystal cathedrals 8 feet high, solid quartz crystals 3 feet long, and spheres a foot in diameter. I think the Smithsonian could have bought some of the pieces from this shop! I moseyed to the back and picked up a few souvenirs (the lowest tier trinkets were still about R\$25, but were very worth it!) An amethyst crystal with a toucan, a Brazilian guitar CD, and a couple books and postcards, and some Brazilian chocolate made some nice souvenirs. This was one of my first really shopping in Brazil,



and we soon figured out how the shops generally run - you get a ticket, pay first, then go back to another counter to pick up your bags.

Behind the souvenir shop was another mini-zoo, like back at the hotel in Manaus - amazing displays of scarlet macaws, blue and gold macaws, toucans, parrots, cranes, and all other sorts of exotic tropical birds. There was an orchid garden in the back as well as some beautiful landscaping - trees with hybrids of pink and white flowers. We had planned on making this a "short stop - you have 15 minutes", but it ended up taking at least an hour! But time not wasted by any means.

We arrived at the hotel, which was right near the edge of Iguacu Falls. In fact it was the only hotel in the national park. It was the Tropical Hotel das Cataratas, which is part of the same "Tropical" chain as the hotel in Manaus. A few of us made a sunset walk to the falls - the flowing cascades were bathed in an orange glow as the sun got low on the horizon. Twilight on the falls was like out of a fairy tale. I spent probably 1/2 hour making time-exposure shots of the falls in the waning light. The falls turned into smooth silky streams, flowing into puffs of cotton at the base, while the warm orange glow from the evening twilight lit the scene.

I had gotten so wrapped up in the moment that I almost forgot we had to meet at 7:00 to get on the bus to dinner and a show. I was walking with Ron, and as it got pretty dark (and I was using the screen from my camera as a flashlight), Ron found a shortcut and started heading up some stairs. The elevator had been shut down for the evening, which caught me by surprise. I missed the shortcut and kept going straight toward the road. I got a bit worried, but at least getting back to the hotel was easy - just follow the road, dodging the coatis roaming around scavenging bits of food. I just hoped Ron found the road too. About 5 minutes later, I saw him way ahead of me!

We were back just in time - about 6:58! My clothes were soaked from the spray of the falls and thanks to Emory for giving me an extra (dry) sweatshirt for the show! Since our room was at the far end of the hotel (the Tropical hotels are very linear and it's probably a 15 minute walk from one end to the other!), I probably wouldn't have time and I didn't want to make the group late waiting for me.

We headed to the Rafain Churrascaria for dinner and gorged ourselves with all kinds of meat, seafood, sushi, pasta, and dessert. It was nice to have so many choices. The raw oysters and fresh salmon sashimi really hit the spot. We enjoyed a few caiparinhas over dinner as the show was starting. It was similar to the last one in Rio, featuring samba dancers, a bola dance, some wonderful costumes, and an "extreme" harpist who played the harp like he was in a heavy metal band (I thought was going to set it on fire when he was done). There was also a Mexican mariachi band and some other folk groups did a few songs as well. And this time, the bola dancer had a volunteer get in front of her, and she swung the balls so fast and so close to the volunteer that his hair moved (he didn't flinch a bit - whew!). The packed house gave a great ovation.

I needed a good recharge overnight, and so did my camera batteries (recording 10 minutes of video at the samba show, and using the screen as a flashlight took quite a bit of battery juice). I slept quite well in the hotel.

## July 1

We had all day at the falls - I was really looking forward to this day. I woke up early, and much to my dismay all I saw was a lot of fog out the window of our room. Some of the other tourists complained about yesterday being so foggy until about 1:00 (so the air traffic control folks weren't lying after all). Hmmm - we'd have to wait until 1:00 again today? We planned on going on a boat tour up close to the falls (like the Maid of the Mist at Niagara Falls), which left at 10:00. We'd have to see about the fog - maybe we could do the boat tour later?

After breakfast at the hotel, I looked outside, and it was suddenly all clear! Cool - the fog had burned off earlier. We got on the bus and headed to the Macucu Safari just down the street - it was a little pricy, but well worth it to get up close to the awesome falls. We took a wagon ride through a narrow road in the rainforest, where we could see the plants and a couple birds up close. Some of us got out a little early and walked a path to the river, while the rest stayed on the wagon. We hiked toward a smaller waterfall along the way, when suddenly we noticed a bunch of gem stones right in the rocks along the trail! I guess the gems are pretty abundant in Brazil - there were some moderate sized geodes which had formed in the lava rocks.

Iguacu falls is in an interesting geologic area - a volcanic flow had formed a harder cap rock, which eroded to form near vertical cliffs. And minerals had seeped into the gas pockets trapped in the lava to form geodes (I guess those 8 foot geodes were some pretty big pockets and it took a long time to form!) We hiked down to the falls, actually going behind the falls as well - pretty cool. A little further on the trail, we met the rest of the group, where we got on the boats.

We filled 2 boats - actually giant motorized inflatable rafts that could navigate the swift rapids in the Iguacu river. We were prepared to get very wet and cameras were in bags, just in case! I was being so careful - I really didn't want anything to happen at this point in the trip. At least I had swapped memory cards, so I would only lose half the pictures if my camera was ruined.

We cruised up the river, visiting the fork of the falls on the Argentina side (I guess we had crossed the border, but we just couldn't technically set foot on the land without a visa, but in a boat it was OK). The rainbows were so bright and beautiful as we got close to the falls. I was impressed at how the rafts could handle the swift currents and 8 foot waves in the river (this would be probably class IV or V whitewater at least!) We went a little ways up the "Devil's throat" toward the main horseshoe of the falls, but the rocks were a bit rough to go much further. At higher flows, you can actually go further in. We got completely drenched, actually more from hitting the immense waves getting to the falls, than from the spray itself. We made a couple passes, each time daring to get a little closer to the water pouring down.

The flow was down quite a bit, which actually made the two-tiered falls more picturesque. Supposedly during a couple of the El Nino years, the river was so high that the middle tier was completely covered - the rust-colored water was 40 meters deeper (making the falls look just like a big muddy rapid instead of a vertical curtain of water). There are at least 300 separate waterfalls - the place is definitely a wonder of the natural world! And unlike Niagara with its main horseshoe of falls, Iguacu has waterfalls coming out of what seems to be just everywhere. Everywhere you looked, there were more smaller waterfalls.

We spent probably 1/2 hour back at the entrance of the Macucu Safari waiting for the bus to come back to pick us up. Meanwhile, we were amazed by a spectacular butterfly display - there were brilliant butterflies with shimmering blue wings, some with red, green, yellow, and even with transparent wings. They would land right on your finger and open their wings for a photogenic moment (normally butterflies with bright wings keep them closed, since they would be easier for predators to see). After being awed by nature's artwork in the butterfly wings for a while, we discovered the bus was actually there all along - the driver was waiting for us for a half hour!

It was nice to get back to the hotel and change into dry clothes again. I draped as many of my wet clothes as I could, hoping they would dry at least a little before we got on the plane tomorrow (I was only about 2 kg short of the weight limit by now with my luggage, and wet clothes wouldn't help). Ron probably spent 1/2 hour with the hair dryer from our room trying to dry his jeans (that was his last pair - the others had developed a bit of a rank smell by now), but it was to little avail. Oh well - smelly jeans weren't as bad as soaking wet ones.

A few of the people decided to get a quick lunch and head over to a bird sanctuary near the river. As for me, I had seen a bunch of wonderful birds - even at the souvenir shop yesterday! But I'd rather look for birds in the wild than see them in cages (I had seen plenty of birds in cages - there are so many even at the SF zoo!). The rest of us walked back to the falls, enjoying burgers and fries at one of the restaurants (our first "American" food on the trip). We mostly just spent hours soaking in the wonder of the place, drinking in the splendor of the falls, rainbows, canyons, and rainforest. Catwalks went out along the middle tier of the falls, giving us a panoramic view (I think this was probably the best view possible, since on the Argentina side, you couldn't get that close). Words just can't describe what the experience was like. It was one of those moments that made you want to sing - and the first song that came to mind - of course - was "la la la" from the Psalmo. In fact, the relentless words and rhythm was going through my head most of the day. And the Gershwin "Fascinating Rhythm" didn't help either - when that got started in my head, it would torture me for hours!

It was about 5:00 when we started moseying our way back to the hotel. A toucan with a bright orange beak flew overhead. It had been such a perfect day! A couple of us went to the tower on top of the hotel for an even better view of the falls. But there was more to come. They were running rappel trips - where you could rappel on a rope 55 meters

down the cliff down to the river, with a great view of the falls all around. It was definitely a memorable experience and quite worth the R\$75. Gently twirling around as the rope passed through my figure-8 on my way down was defiantly an adrenaline inducing experience. It was a free-hanging rappel all the way down from a platform that extended probably 10 meters over the cliff face. Now when are they going to have a rappelling opportunity from the platform they just built over the Grand Canyon? The spiral staircase to get back up was quite an experience as well! Climbing through hanging gardens of wild impatiens and ferns and tropical plants was a beautiful (though not so easy) walk - I got my Stairmasters in for the day.

We enjoyed a nice happy hour with free drinks while watching the sun setting low over the river canyon. Fog was starting to fill the canyon and the orange sun skimmed the surface of the mist. Just afterward, we enjoyed our "last supper" at the hotel. The wine was included this time, and we dined with the music of a graceful harp (played normally this time, not like a heavy metal rocker!)

And the day was still not over - it was a full moon outside, and our timing was perfect. During full moons, they give guided walks to the falls, and tonight was a perfect night. I had never seen a "moon-bow" before, but the mist of the falls and the bright moon gave me the perfect opportunity. I found that my opening my camera aperture to f/2.8 and using a 15 second exposure at ISO 400 gave pictures that looked like daylight! Except the water was silky smooth and stars twinkled overhead in the pictures. And the moonbows actually proved to have the same colors as regular rainbows during the day. Turns out the eye is just not sensitive enough to pick out the colors at night, but the camera is. I just had to be very careful to make sure my camera didn't get soaked from the spray as it was sitting on a railing for 15 seconds to capture a time-exposure. I also had to be careful when using the railings climbing the stairs, since the railings were full of bugs - crickets, spiders, praying mantis, beetles, and other more exotic bugs - I guess they are nocturnal since they weren't there during the day.

## July 2

Alas, our wonderful trip was nearing its end, and we were ready to begin the long journey home. We got one last look at the falls in the morning, capturing the rainbows behind us, before we got our suitcases on the bus to head to the airport. After breakfast, we checked into the Foz de Iguazu airport, and caught our 1:30 flight (which left at 2:00).

We got into Sao Paulo around 3:30, and since we didn't have to fly out until after 10:00, we decided to visit the town and have a look. Ilse graciously arranged a coach and tour for us so we could get to the city - and it was only about an extra R\$20 or so - well worth it. I wasn't about to sit around in the airport for 7 hours (actually we would end up sitting much longer than that, but that comes later in the story). After enjoying some ice cream (I think we had ice cream almost every day on this trip), we started heading toward downtown. Sao Paulo is the 3rd largest city in the world - with 20 million people (actually most populous in the southern hemisphere)! It was up there with Tokyo, Seoul, and New York.

It was about 45 minutes along the freeway into town, mostly against traffic as people were getting off work. We got to visit the stunning Sao Paulo cathedral, complete with Gothic style flying buttresses, spires, rose windows, and vaulted ceilings. It was like visiting Westminster Abbey or any of the great cathedrals in Europe. Of course there was a lot of European influence in Brazil, since it was originally a Portuguese colony. Of course we had to assemble the voices we had and sing a couple numbers (even though I think we only had 2 basses and 1 alto, but so what?) The music was like the sound of heaven as it reverberated on the marble walls all around us.

We did a bit of a walking tour around Sao Paulo, visiting the Praca da Se town square just opposite the cathedral, a street market downtown, a monastery, and a famous opera house. It was definitely an interesting city, and the sights of downtown were beautiful. But a large part of the city is quite poor - the favelas there were even more notorious than those in Rio. In Rio they were constructed of brick and wood, but in Sao Paulo, a lot of them were bits of plastic and cardboard and other trash. They say Sao Paulo is even more dangerous than Rio, so we made sure our group stayed together during our tour.

It was a stream of solid traffic back to the airport - it probably took an hour and a half to get back. But our flight wasn't supposed to leave for a while yet, so we had time to kill. After grabbing something to eat at the airport (you could never count on getting fed on planes anymore these days), we boarded our plane for our 10:45 departure. We were all in our seats, seatbelts fastened, tray tables to their full and upright locked positions, luggage stowed in the overhead bins and under our seats, and we were ready to push back for an on-time departure.

But instead of pushing back, we sat. And we sat some more. And some more. Then came some short announcement hastily spoken in Portuguese which none of us understood (which I was thinking might be "flight attendants, prepare for departure"). And we sat some more. Finally, they said air traffic control couldn't let us depart right away, but we should be cleared shortly. Then I looked out the window, and it didn't look quite as clear as before - the lights were looking hazy. Then they became even hazier - then I couldn't see them at all - it had become quite foggy. We sat longer, anticipating every little sound to be the engines warming up on our A320 to take off. But no such luck.

By 2:30 am or so, they told us to get off the plane - the airport was shut down because of fog. Well, if we had taken off on time, we would have beat the fog! They said come back at 9:00 am and you can find a hotel if you want (they weren't about to help us with that - we were on our own). So we got off and prepared to curl up on the floor of the airport and try to doze until morning. Then came another announcement - we had to go back and get our luggage! Our luggage?! I didn't want my luggage! It was supposed to be checked all the way through... But no, we had to go to baggage claim, sift through the mess of displaced passengers and their luggage (all 21 flights for the evening were canceled because of the fog as well). It was strange going through customs again, since we hadn't gone anywhere! We had no forms or any proof that we were legitimate, but all the security personnel knew the airport was closed so they just let us pass through.

At least none of our bags were lost. We schlepped the luggage around the airport, trying to figure out where to hang out and wait until morning. Since we had to go outside security, we were back in the common area by the check-in counter. What a hassle! Thousands of passengers all stranded all around us, schlepping their luggage, trying to find taxis to nearby hotels or just going home to give up with their trips or calling friends and relatives on their cell phones - it was a mad house. Normally by 3:30 am, the airport should be deserted.

At least with my luggage, I pulled out a jacket (which I didn't plan on needing, but now I'm glad I had it), and curled up to snooze a bit. I woke up a couple hours later, sore in strange areas from lying on the hard tile floor of the airport. Supposedly I had missed some news action - a local SBT news camera had filmed me sleeping when reporting a news story! A couple hours later, the check-in counter opens and we are able to off-load our luggage. Since we already had bar codes on the luggage, they didn't need to go through the computer again, so they put us in a separate line where we could just go right through and drop the bags on the belt. But then the belt stopped working - it jammed! There were guys running up and down the belt, trying to figure out what happened and why it jammed. Hmmm - the saga continued.

Finally about 15-20 minutes later, they got it working and we dropped off our bags. It was about 5 am now. Security wouldn't open for 2 more hours. So we curled up again to try to nap, but with little success. It was probably worth just going up to the line and waiting there, since we'd be waiting anyway. Then suddenly, we realized we needed to get our boarding passes re-issued and re-stamped. There was an immigration control that required the boarding passes to be validated with a passport and stamped. But they were already stamped and taken the first time we got on the plane. We weren't even supposed to be where we were - they had to somehow "reset the system" and allow us to pass again! Thankfully, Ilse took charge and got our boarding passes re-issued.

### July 3

Actually it had been July 3 for about 7 hours now, but it didn't feel like it - it just felt like a "really long July 2", and the saga was to continue quite a bit more. The security line opened briefly and I think a couple people went through, since the line moved a little. But then it stopped for at least 20 minutes. Maybe it was just compressing? Then it moved again a couple people and stopped again. Probably around 8, we were finally moving. I just hoped the ordeal would be about over. I didn't try to think of what to do in Miami yet - of course we were all going to miss that flight. It was even tougher for some others - one girl got sick in the security line and had to jump a couple of the barriers (right near the security guard) to "let it fly" in one of the nearby trash cans. At least I was feeling OK at this point.

Our flight still said boarding at 9:00, and we were there. But it was clear looking out the airport windows that we weren't going to take off at 9:00. I could barely see the tail of our airplane through the dense fog! Hmmm - was it ever going to burn off? It seemed like with modern radar and air traffic control systems that we could at least take off in the

fog. (Landing is a different matter). But the airport was still closed - nobody was landing or taking off. Finally about 10:00, they said we could board the plane, and by 11:00, when the fog had burned off enough to reveal a couple patches of blue sky, we were pushing back.

From the air, we could see the full extent of the fog, covering much of the area around Sao Paulo for probably hundreds of miles. I guess it was pretty severe after all. In a way, it was good the airlines erred on the side of safety and didn't take the risk. (But not even a week later, a TAM Airlines A320 crashed in inclement weather while trying to land in Sao Paulo, killing hundreds of people on the plane and on the ground - go figure).

Flying over the tropics of northern Brazil (we probably crossed the Amazon somewhere, but it was all in clouds), then crossing the northern coast into the blue waters of the Caribbean, then Cuba and the tropical paradise islands surrounding it, we made our way toward Miami. It had been a pretty smooth easy flight the whole way, when I looked ahead toward Miami, I just saw a dense wall of dark clouds. A band of thunderstorms was making its way across southern Florida. I just hoped we wouldn't be diverted to another airport because of inclement weather - by now I just wanted to get home!

The rain was just starting as we landed and a couple flashes of distant lightning lit up part of the sky. I was just glad we landed safely. We got to the baggage claim and waited to claim our bags. We waited and waited, and no bags showed up. Maybe they were on the other carousel (that one also said Sao Paulo, but a different flight number). After about 30 minutes, people were starting to file missing baggage claim forms. Hmmm - this made things interesting. We had to figure out so many things -

- can we get a flight out tonight on standby?
- if so, we wouldn't have our luggage and would have to wait probably several days.
- if not, we could try to get our luggage the next morning. But could we find a hotel overnight?
- and if we got the hotel, we wouldn't have any change of clothes (but at least we could take a shower)

At least I was smart and packed some toiletries in my carry-on this time (I hadn't been doing this earlier on the trip). It seemed like some people were starting to do their own thing - it felt like a "every man for himself" time at this point. I lagged behind, hoping my bags would show up (the carousels were still moving and fresh bags were still showing up sporadically). When I was in line to file a missing bag form, most of the group had gone to speak with an AA representative about getting a hotel room. I lost the group (I was just with Emory and Galen and a couple others, but I forgot they weren't going back to SFO right away, so they were away from the group on purpose).

I finally got in touch with a TAM representative (I didn't realize the group had gone to talk with AA, since the luggage problem was TAM's). I managed to get a voucher for a free hotel at the nearby Regency hotel, as well as free dinner and breakfast at the hotel. A small victory for a tough journey was well received. And they said I could go to the AA

counter where they could re-issue boarding passes to SFO the next morning. I was satisfied at this point and just wanted to crash for the night. At least I wasn't schlepping bags at this point. I ate at the Burger King at the airport (didn't expect the hotel restaurant to still be open, so why take the chance? But alas, it wasn't free - oh well), then took the free shuttle to the hotel. It was quite a vivid display of lightning and thunder outside while waiting for the shuttle - we don't get that in the Bay Area!

At the hotel, I'm by myself at this point - I was too tired and didn't really care to try to find the others - at least I had a free hotel with a nice warm bed for the night (no more curling up on cold hard floor at the airport). I watched a few minutes of an old James Bond flick before hitting the sack (I felt like Bond over the last couple days, being on a mission, trying to complete an epic journey).

I wondered how the rest of the group was doing on their flight home – they probably missed all this excitement. Actually not – I found out later they had their own saga. It had become foggy in Rio de Janeiro on the night they were supposed to fly out as well, and their flight was cancelled. They had to fly the next day and deal with all the same hassles of getting rebooked on flights the next day!

#### July 4

I had two alarms set this morning at 7:00 to be extra sure I would be up in time to not miss my flight. They went off within 30 seconds of each other, so yes I was up. One last free breakfast - a buffet at the hotel, and I caught the 7:30 shuttle to the Miami airport.

Miraculously, my bags were sitting behind the TAM counter. I thought the luggage never made it on the flight, after the fiasco with the luggage in Sao Paulo, and the belts being broken and who knows what else. Turned out the bags did come in, but they had stopped baggage operations because the rain was so intense (waiting overnight for our bags was probably better than having them completely soaked). Actually, the airport was technically closed for a few hours – no flights were running and everything was stopped! This was our third airport in a row to be closed – Iguacu (fog), Sao Paulo (fog), and Miami (thunderstorms).

I got my bags at the TAM counter – what a relief! Then, when I turned around, I ran into Andrea! She had been going through a similar saga of trying to get her bags, and our timing must have been impeccable! We rolled our bags down to the AA counter and checked them in (we already had our boarding passes, so we just had to get stickers for them). I guess the airline took care of passing our bags through customs in Miami, since we didn't take them there.

We got on our flight to Dallas – and got a nice view of another band of thunderstorms from 37000 feet. They turned on the seat belt sign while we slalomed our way between the clouds for a while just glad we didn't have to wait any longer! The turbulence was moderate – apparently the electronic stabilization on planes these days is pretty good.



A smooth landing in Dallas (it could have been closed too but luckily the thunderstorms weren't too close to the airport there). We enjoyed a Texas BBQ burger during our short connection before we got on our last plane of the trip – heading back to SFO. It was an easy, uneventful flight over the desert southwest, over Lake Powell, Bryce and Zion, NV, the Sierra, and back to San Francisco (and no fog in SF causing further delays – whew!). We were back finally around 3:00 in the afternoon – just under 24 hours later than planned. I couldn't believe we were finally home – what a journey!

Over the next few days, we would compare notes on our return saga. I was actually quite lucky to get a free hotel (AA only gave discounted rates on rooms, but TAM gave me a free room and free meals). I was also one of the few to get home with my luggage. About 5 people got out on standby from Miami and got their bags 4 days later.

My friend Ray Harwood picked me up (Rob and Rachel got a standby flight the night before, and it wasn't fair to ask Rachel's dad to make two trips). Ray and I enjoyed some time in the pool (now this really felt like vacation – without a care in the world now), then headed up to Foster City for dinner and the wonderful fireworks over the lagoon. I felt the fireworks were celebrating a successful journey home!

My pictures from this trip are online at <http://community.webshots.com/user/mattshots>.