

Hill Cumorah Expedition Team 2005

A Personal Testimony Account

By Neil Steede

On April 3, 2005 I climbed the hill with my group of friends in great anticipation. My anticipation was based on the use of the 1976 photograph of the hill as well as the recent translation of the “Proclamation Tablet.” Moreover, for the first time I had solid agreements from several main epigraphers to help with future translations in the event we were to find ancient writings. I felt extremely confident that this would be the year that we would find the plates within the Hill Cumorah. Now, on this day we were having our first prayer meeting and communion service in preparation for the work that we were about to commence. As we held the first segment of our meeting we went our separate ways to meditate.

The first distraction from my meditation was Fred Elliott telling me that policemen were coming up the hill. I was not overly concerned for I had just been asking my Lord to give me some guidance of what to do. Just as I was standing to go see the police Forrest Liggett stepped in front of me. I could see the sphere of the Holy Spirit in which he was enveloped, and as he approached me I became enveloped in the same sphere. Forrest took me by the shoulders and, freely weeping, told me that he had been praying for me and that everything would be fine. I cradled his face in my hands and I said, “I know,” for I felt the power of my Master arising within me.

I turned to begin my descent and before I took two steps there were several officers around us. I asked them what they wanted and they said the Mayor wished to talk to me. I responded, “What took him so long?”

As we began descending two things happened simultaneously; first, my communication to the group to stay where they were and not worry as I had been invited to visit the mayor. At the same time I realized that the policemen that were taking me were unaware that I was lame and legally blind. I was about to communicate this to the policemen when Forrest stated that he was going with me. He said, “You can’t have all the fun by yourself.” And I loved him.

While going down the hill the police were very demanding as to the route to be taken. Not wanting to set a mood that they had total control, I would deliberately take different paths. Forrest comprehended and assisted me at every turn. But, this caused some consternation among the police. As we walked down, Forrest and I realized that there were ten to eleven police officers and I asked them, “Wouldn’t one of you have been enough for an invitation?” And then I made a slight jeer by saying, “Did it take eleven of you to get a blind cripp?”

Finally we reached the road where there were two pick-up trucks waiting for us. We were told to get into the back of separate trucks to keep us apart. I also told them to keep more guards on Forrest since I wouldn’t be so hard to chase down. They turned on their emergency lights and sped to town. While in the back of the truck the two guards that watched me immediately began to question me. After a moment or two one of the guards pointed to the corner of the truck in which I was sitting and there was a large rat walking toward me. I felt as though the guard was testing my fear factor, but I immediately felt the confidence

that this animal would do me no harm and this animal began walking toward me. I extended my hand and the animal walked right up on it and as it turned out it was a possum and not a rat. The guard seemed somewhat surprised as I cradled the possum and the possum immediately went to sleep.

Upon arrival at the police station I carefully laid my sleeping friend in the corner of the truck bed and though my guards indicated that I should get out of the truck by using the tailgate, I opted to go over the side. They began to indicate the direction I should go, but the ground was very broken and rough and I was unsure as to where to step. I repeatedly asked one of the guards to lead me instead of pushing me as he was. Finally, another guard had compassion and could see that I needed a guide. And so, he extended his hand and led me through the rubble, up the steps and to the main police office. Once inside the office, two chairs were set square against the wall for Forrest and I to set in. I didn't care for the formality so I pushed the interrogator's chairs to the wall and moved Forrest and mine to the center of the room.

The Chief of Police wanted to know where we were from, who we were, and what business we had on the Hill. We explained that we had no papers with us but that our tourist permits were in our hotel in Tuxtepec some forty miles away. Soon he got tired of asking the same questions and once he comprehended that Forrest could speak no Spanish and could be of no help he left the room. Upon returning, he was accompanied by the Mayor of Jalapa de Diaz, Alvaro Rafael Rubio,

and his assistant, Fecundo. They began asking the same questions. The question most asked by the Mayor was, “What permit do you have to be on that hill?” To which I repeatedly answered the same, “My tourist permit into your country allows me to go to any national forest and any private lands to which I have permission. So, it is my permit.”

The second in command most often asked the question, “Why did you bring arms?” To which I answered, “We did not.” He asked, “Didn’t you shoot at the hill?” To which I replied, “No.” This frustrated him extremely, so he would then ask, “Weren’t you here last year at this same time?” To which I answered, “Yes.” He then responded, “Ah ha. So, it was you shooting at the hill.” To which I responded, “No.” This cycle continued for about a half an hour. At the end of each cycle he would get mad and clench his fist. To Forrest I pointed out that particular movement looked like Jay Leno.

Then the Mayor began questioning, asking what we were looking for. To which I responded, “Ancient sacred writings.” He then responded, “You do not have an archaeological permit.” I then stated, “Since we can not yet prove the ancient writings are there, I need no permit. I am not digging.” The Mayor would say you need a permit and the cycle began again. Fortunately, this cycle only lasted about ten minutes.

By the time two hours had gone by Forrest and I had worn out five interrogators. And, the Mayor told me that we were under arrest until he could contact the Mexican State Department. I said, “Good. Nice

move. Except...(raising my index finger in the air) I don't know if it is legal to arrest us on nothing." He said, "You have no papers." I answered, "They are in our hotel." Again, the cycle repeated for another five or ten minutes. Now the Mayor also using a Leno-like gesture told us to stay until he made a phone call. Of course it was Sunday evening and no one was answering the phone at the Federal office he was attempting to contact. So, he returned, again frustrated, and talked at length in his native tongue of Mazatec to his second in command.

The Mayor sat down in front of me, leaned forward on his chair, with his hat pushed far back on his head as though he was a good friend, and he said "Look blondie, we will let you go, just do not come back. The people of Jalapa do not want you here." I began laughing and said, "You actually expect me to believe that you went out into the City Jalapa and woke up everyone and took a vote of what the people want? You sir, do not know what the people of Jalapa want. As soon as we leave here we will go back up the hill. And I don't believe you have the right to tell us we can not, since we have permission of landowners and are on Federal Reserve land. So, are you going to with us to our hotel in Tuxtepec to see our papers?" He replied, "No, you will have to stay here tonight until Federal Authorities come in the morning." To which I responded, "As I have said, you have no right to arrest us without charges. We have broken no laws. Oh, excuse me, I guess the laws of Jalapa are quite different than the laws of the rest of Mexico and they allow no religious freedom." He replied, "No, it is not going to be an

arrest. It will be like a house arrest. You can go out to our village and have a coke. But, you can not leave the town.” Once again I laughed and said, “I love you politicians. You always have new terminology. You act like arrest and house arrest are completely different.” I patted him on the shoulder and said, “My friend, I would think carefully about what you are doing.” In my opinion, he did not care for my advice and left the room along with all other officials.

It had now been approximately three hours and I said to Forrest, “Well, let’s test it and let’s go get a coke.” As we were about to walk out we were surprised to find Jerry Stoner and Mike Brown who had finally left the hill and come looking for us. We explained our situation and turned to tell the police that here were our friends who could go back to the hotel to get our papers. But, the police said no and that they (Mike and Jerry) were now under arrest also and could not leave the town either. We all laughed and I told Mike and Jerry they were guilty by association. All this cheerfulness bewildered our guards. We walked out the front door across the patio and into the Town Square. No one did anything to stop us.

We went to the only open restaurant and had a soda. Of course, the local store proprietor was curious as to what had transpired. We told the story at great length to the locals who had gathered, and one man said, “Don’t they know who you are? I remember when you were here on trial with Juan Carranza and you have been coming for many, many years?” I was amazed and replied, “Yes. For thirty years.” He then

began to relate to me the stories and the legends of Jalapa. He knew of the three men who come annually to check-up on the “National Treasury.” He knew that no one could follow them. He knew of the many times that local people had accosted me when visiting the hill. He knew about the caves that I was looking for and in fact, knew about two of the backpacks that were stolen just last year. As he talked the crowd at the little four-table restaurant began to grow, and a lady brought her niece who was about seven years old. The lady said, “She can speak English and help translate for you if you need help.” Indeed, the beautiful little girl spoke impeccable English having lived in the United States for four years.

The crowd spilled over into the street in front of the little restaurant, and as we sat there in a spirit of great amazement and joy, the doorway darkened with the figure of a huge man who stood on the threshold. He looked at us and said, “I am Vincente, if they will not let you go, call me. I will come. I will help you.” And the clinching of his fists told us that he would fight for us.

At that point, I realized that we had overstayed the allotted time that the police had given us and the four of us began to return to the palace. The people in the street and the restaurant advised us over and over to, “Go...go!” Meaning they wanted us to flee. We were all touched by this outpouring from people we did not know. And, as we walked toward the municipal palace, even the local bar came out to tell us to, “Run...go!” Mike and I looked to one another and smiled and I

said to Mike, “I don’t think we should take their advice.” He agreed. But, we loved them deeply for their concern.

We arrived back at the palace and were met by the Police Chief and some of his men. We asked about the Mayor as though I was a child and could not speak Spanish, the Chief replied, “Tomorrow...tomorrow.” I asked, “Tomorrow?” He assured me that yes, tomorrow the Mayor would meet with us. I called over my three companions for verification. Again, I asked the Chief if we were free to go and we would meet the mayor tomorrow. He assured us over and over, “Yes.” The four of us began smiling and hugging each other. As we began to walk across the courtyard, a little old janitor stepped in front of me and said, “I do not think you should go. It is up to you. You can go if you wish, but I do not think you should go.” I relayed this information to my companions. I asked the old man, “Is it not over?” He said, “Do not go.” I asked, “Can we not leave?” He said, “I would not.”

The four of us contemplated his words as we walked toward the truck. We got into the truck still talking and a policeman came over and asked where we were going. We answered that we were leaving, that it was over and that we planned to return tomorrow. We said that we were sure that the Police Chief had said to go. He Said, “Do not leave the town.” And I said, “Where do we stay?” He shrugged and said, “Do not leave the town.” I told my companions that I was convinced that the old man and the young policeman were our friends trying to tell us truth.

At that moment, a new man who we had not seen up to this time appeared. He was dressed in a florescent green shirt and he claimed to be the Secretary of Ecology of Jalapa. He claimed to know that we had come last year and shot arms at the hill. He used exactly the same terminology that the Mayor had used several hours previously. Something was wrong. There was a belief among these people that we had brought arms into the country and shot at the hill. This is now the second source we were hearing this from. However, this green shirt man was drunk and though he spoke with seeming authority he was overbearing. He kept repeating himself over and over. As I walked away from him he would follow me repeating the same things over and over. Finally, as luck would have it, the Police Chief and his truck with some of his men were passing through the center of town. We flagged him down and asked, "Are we not free to go until tomorrow?" He said, "Yes." We asked, "Can we not leave the town." He replied, "No. You must wait until we hear from the Federales." Now, our sprig of hope seemed to die, yet we smiled as we walked back toward the municipal palace once again, not looking forward to sleeping on the concrete steps of the plaza building. Once again, Green Shirt began to harass us, he claimed to know that we had broken Federal laws and that he would see us in prison. Finally, I told him to "Leave me alone." And he said, "We have witnesses that you have done the things I accuse of you." I said, "We did not have arms, so you did not see us do that, in spite of what you claim. Where are the witnesses?" He answered that, "They are

from far away.” I pushed further, “If they are from far away, as you say, then how could they see what you claim they saw?” Upon posing this question, for the first time, Green Shirt had no answer. Angered, he grabbed me by the shirt and said, “I saw you. I saw you do these things.” I of course, knew he was lying, but also suspected him to be a great danger to us. It was very obvious that he fervently believed what he said and that he would go to any length to convict us--even to the point of lying. Again, Green Shirt grabbed me by the arm, but this time one of the policemen who had been observing us could seemingly take no more and he grabbed Green Shirt by the arms and began to shout at him in their native tongue. And, though we could not understand a word, we knew that this policeman was berating Green Shirt terribly. He trembled as he shouted. Other policemen stood behind him as if to support what was being shouted and as he finished he pushed Green Shirt away and then turned to us to say, “He should have nothing to do with this. He is butting in where he does not belong. He has nothing to do here and he is nothing. Do not pay heed to him.” I took the policeman by his arms and looked him in the eyes and told him, “Thank you for protecting us. You are our friend.” He nodded, and we walked across the palace plaza and sat down to decide what to do for the night.

As we sat under the clear night sky, some of the people from the restaurant, including the proprietor, came to sit with us. Proprietor spoke for all, asking, “You are staying?” I responded, “Yes.” He said, “I knew you would.” And some of them began to settle for the evening

as though they would vigilantly sit with us all night. Then our friend the proprietor pointed across the courtyard and said, “The Mayor is back.” I asked, “Is that normal?” He responded, “No. He is never here on Sunday.”

A few moments later we were requested to go to the front of the palace. There in the dark shadows, as though it was being done in secret, the Mayor and his helper stated that they would release us and that the Mayor’s private Secretary would accompany us to Tuxtepec to see our papers and verify our documents and tourist visas. Of course, we smiled because we made this very suggestion at the beginning of this adventure. But, they then asked for one more thing, “Do you know anything of medicine and of snake bites?” In fact, we had two members of our team who had medical training. Forrest Liggett was one of them. I indicated this to the Mayor. He informed us that they had a young girl who was a snakebite victim and they thought she might be dying. “Could you please look in upon her before you leave?” they asked. I translated this information to Forrest. Forrest’s immediate response was, “How long ago was she bitten?” They claimed it had been some three or four hours earlier. Immediately I chastised them for having waited so long in making their request. The spirit of cooperation between the municipal authorities and our group was born at that moment.

Now, with great care, the police led Forrest and I about four blocks through the dark night on the rough concrete and stone-embedded streets. We arrived to a very humble dirt floor home. The family

members hovered closely in worry over a young girl who possibly had a light fever, and was totally limp yet conscious and had an erratic pulse. Upon examining the foot and leg, Forrest felt as though we should take the girl to Tuxtepec where Tim Brown might be able to treat her more effectively with the medic kit that was at the hotel. The authorities immediately agreed and the girl was taken to an awaiting taxi and accompanied by her mother, father, and sister they followed us to the hotel in Tuxtepec. At the same time, next to the taxi, Forrest and I were led to where Jerry and Mike were waiting with Jerry's truck. As we sped towards Tuxtepec with the taxi following us with our critical patient, we noticed the taxi was being followed by the police guard truck because we were still considered desperados. We called ahead to our group members at the hotel in Tuxtepec and advised them of what was coming. We further advised of the need to attend to our young patient, Catalina, as soon as we arrived. After racing to the hotel for forty-five minutes, I could not be more proud of my fellow members of the Community of Christ as each and everyone to a man stood behind a chair on the outside stoop of the hotel awaiting our arrival. The ailing girl was helped to the chair. There, Tim and Forrest examined her together. She complained of back pains, stomach pains, and the pain at the bite which she had received on the instep of the left foot near the big toe.

The parents had the prescriptions she had been given which had included an anti-venom injection. At this point Forrest and Tim knew

that no more medical treatment would be needed. Tim said that he felt guided under the Spirit to say that the back pain and the stomach pain were probably results of the venom settling into the lower back. We asked the parents if we could say a prayer for Catalina. They agreed without hesitation. Then I asked if it was all right to perform a laying on of hands? With the help of Ron Van Fleet I explained where this sacrament could be found in the New Testament. After only a moment's hesitation, they again said yes.

I was sitting at her feet, cradling her swollen leg. Forrest asked Jerry for a prayer for the sacrament. The entire group then joined hands and included the family of Catalina and the Secretary of the Mayor in a circle around the young girl with the Elders at her side. With many of the members of the group kneeling, Jerry Stoner then gave a prayer asking for the presence of healing angels at this administration. With this prayer complete, three men then applied the oil of consecration and prayed for a complete healing for Catalina. These men were Ron Van Fleet, Mike Brown, and Forrest Liggett. During this time it seemed as if the entire group was surrounded by this bubble in which there was no time—as if time stood still. There was to my awareness, no traffic noise from the busy street just a few yards away.

Upon completing the administration we stood and Ron thought to ask if they have any other needs. The family said no. Ron then asked and I translated, “Do you need any help with the medicines?” They said, “Yes, please.” I then looked into the eyes of Catalina's father and saw

the total financial ruin that was there for the anti-venom and other medicines had cost more than two thousand pesos. I turned to my family and I saw every single one moving to remove money from pants pockets, shirt pockets, billfolds, purses. One member pulled out all the amount to cover the expenses, but it was agreed among all that all needed to contribute. Since I was doing all the translating, I became the focal point of the money collection. I will never forget seeing the money flow from hand-to-hand from all directions to be collected into my hands and then passed to the trembling hands of Catalina's father. It was as though we had all acted in one accord—as a community should. More than enough money was collected and given to the family to offset this unexpected, but necessary expense. We invited the family to stay at the hotel so as to avoid the drive all the way back to Jalapa at this late hour. They respectively declined and were soon off.

Very soon afterwards our group met for evening devotions. Only at this time were many of us caught up with everything that had happened that day. We rejoiced at how amazingly the Lord had opened every door for us, how He was able to use each of us, and how grateful we were for having been a part of this grand opportunity to have served.

That night I went to bed with a tremendous amount of joy because I knew that I had stood this day as a soldier for my Christ. I was able to testify of His work, not to the fullest extent of my ability, but at least to the fullest extent of their ability to withstand my testimony without branding me as a fanatic. How little did I realize that seeds had been

planted this day that were only hours from bearing fruit. Thus ended our first day on the hill. I tossed and turned for about thirty seconds and was soon asleep.

Monday April 4, 2005 members of the group had decided to forgo breakfast and try to arrive in Jalapa early in the day. As we were about to step out of the lobby, a man came up and held out his hand and said, “How are you?” To whom I replied, “Fine, how are you?” He replied fine and then held his hand to Mike Brown and the same niceties were exchanged. During this time, Jerry Stoner stepped toward me and said in a low voice, “That is the Mayor of Jalapa.” Of course, with my poor vision, I had not recognized him. I immediately apologized and asked if he remembered that we were to have a three o’clock appointment at his office in Jalapa de Diaz that afternoon? He replied, “Yes, but I have been thinking about that.” He had heard the report from his private Secretary about the night before. And, he stated that the father said that the girl was cured. He wanted to know if I could join him for breakfast right then in the hotel restaurant to have an uninterrupted discussion. “Of course,” I replied.

For the next two-and-half hours we sat at the table and the Mayor and his wife and I talked. He first asked if we could give other medical assistance to his people. He also requested to know about what we believe and why we believe it. Among the things discussed was our belief in Christ and that sacred writings will be found in Hill Rabon in

his community. I told him about the Popol Vuh and the Book of Mormon. In fact, I asked him to read several verses concerning Cumorah that our group had marked in a Spanish Book of Mormon. Instead of reading several verses he read about a chapter and a half, during which time I could testify to his wife. She requested help with used clothes for orphan and poor children of her town. I said I would see what I could do. And then, I told both of them about the story of the records that testify of Christ that are hidden in their Hill Rabon. I told them of the story of how the hill used to be called Coxca. I told them of the story of the battles that occurred on the very plains that they live upon today. And, I told them of the weapons that their people find, of the origins of how they came to be, and of how they have tested positive for blood. And, I told them that there would be a day when we would find these things, and when that happened that I had written an agreement between myself and himself, the Mayor of Jalapa, and the authorities of the State of Oaxaca, for the excavation, translation, and dissemination of these writings. He asked, "What did you say on my behalf in this agreement?" I replied, "I have requested that no lands or private properties be harmed in any way. I also requested that a replica set of the writings be made and located in a museum in Jalapa. So that, Jalapa may benefit from the tourism." He said, "Thank you, please speak for me." We parted best of friends and he who had arrested me hours before now asked me to be his advocate. He and his wife left carrying a Spanish Book of Mormon and a copy of the textbook Why I

Believe in the Historical Veracity of the Book of Mormon that contained photos and maps of Jalapa de Diaz.

Once again, we were preparing to leave for Jalapa and two reporters arrived and asked for an interview. I agreed and the interview lasted about half-an-hour and almost half way through we were interrupted by two Mexican Officials. The two officials were from the State Department (Gobernacion—the most powerful arm of the Mexican government). They interrupted our interview by introducing themselves with the flashing of credentials. The reporters were immediately ready to leave. However, I told the two agents that I was really thrilled that they had come, if they could please sit down I would be with them as soon as the reporters were finished. To my amazement, they sat down.

The reporters continued for some fifteen minutes that also gave ample time for the Federales to hear our case. Having completed our interview we all shook hands with the reporters as they left. Now, I turned to the Federales and asked what I could do for them. Their first question was, “Do you plan to sue the Municipality of Jalapa de Diaz?” After a chuckle, I assured them that I had no such plans. They stated that I and my friends had been arrested unjustly and that we had a right to sue the municipality. My question was, “What would I get besides the municipal palaces’ stinky bathroom?” In spite of their deadly serious nature, they cracked smiles—the ice was broken. I assured them that I and my friends had been harmed in no way. And that though we had been detained we did understand that these were people trying to do

their job correctly, and we held no malice toward our new friends. They asked if my friends felt the same and Forrest, Mike, and Jerry, all present, all assured them in turn that there was no intention to sue.

The next question was, “Do you plan to report this incident to your government’s State Department?” We simply replied, “No. There are no plans to do any such thing.” At this point we spent another good hour going over the story again as we had with the Mayor and the reporters, including my testimony of the records of Christ we believe to be located in the hill and the local legends of the three visitors to the hill. At the end of which the two agents, whose names we have, but will remain anonymous here, informed us to call them if we needed any assistance in any way, shape, or form. Moreover, their comment on the Coxca agreement was that it seemed to be a wise document by keeping the Federales out of Jalapa’s business. Our group now had two more friends. As they parted they told us “Vaya con Dios,” meaning “go with God”—a statement rarely made by Mexican Federal Government officials.

Once the restaurant had finally cleared of our visitors, our group then traveled the one hour ride to Jalapa to visit with the community, and I had the opportunity to meet with Fecundo, the second in command, as per the Mayor’s request that he made earlier that morning. Fecundo graciously received us at the police plaza, though just the day before he had been our strongest accuser. He had received telephone communication from the Mayor and already knew of our reason for the

visit. Fecundo then reported to us that Catalina's father had told him that Catalina was doing much better. He stated that they had some four hundred children with cataracts in the immediate area. They were desiring our help with this problem, as well as help with gathering used clothing for the children.

About this time we were joined by the Municipal Secretary of Health who provided us with some detailed information about the population, and he asked for assistance with dental issues and diabetic issues in addition to the cataract problems we had already discussed. We made clear that we could not promise anything, but we did agree that we would do whatever we could to see about obtaining the help they were seeking. After listening and noting all their needs, I made the clear point that I our group would be returning to the hill on Tuesday morning, just as I had told this to the Mayor that same morning at breakfast. In neither case did I receive the least amount of opposition concerning our right to return to the hill.

During our visit with Fecundo concerning the health issues of the town, the rest of the group had gathered in the center of Jalapa to visit with the people. Scott Norwood had brought an abundance of balloons that immediately attracted a large crowd of children that Joseph Mangum helped in keeping entertained with his hand puppet. Fred Elliott and Chad Hensley assisted Scott in keeping the children at bay, but during the hour-long meeting we had at the police station the crowd of curious locals at the Town Square had grown very large. We thought

it best to move on and visit Catalina, so we ceased with the balloon-animal-making and our entire group walked down the hill to Catalina's home.

Upon arrival we were richly and warmly welcomed by all members of Catalina's family, but Catalina was not participating. She was still in bed. We each took a turn to visit her in the small bedroom. Each of us, with me as interpreter, visited with her as she smiled weakly. My brother Tim Brown came to me in a lowered voice that she needed to get up and move around, or she would continue to feel the ill effects of the venom as it settled in her back. Once again, without any words, our group acted as a single entity, because without any verbal communication I stepped toward the room and was given space to enter. Of the two visitor's chairs, one was empty for me to rest my cane and I sat on the foot of Catalina's bed. Somehow everyone in our group understood that something was about to happen, because they all stopped asking me to translate for them. I began to speak to Catalina in tones that were soothing and that only she and her mother and father in the immediate vicinity could hear. I began speaking to her concerning the pains she was having in her back and stomach. I lay on the bed beside her and imitated being her. As she lay on her back I explained that the heavy venom and medicine would settle in that part of her body. This is what was causing the back pain. I explained that she must drink much water and stand up for this medication to be flushed from her body with the venomous poisons. I acted out the flushing of the body and

demonstrated the how the medication would flush with the water. I indicated to her that she must walk around the small home four times an hour. I told her that drinking water and eating food would help carry out the venom from her body—the exercise would help it flush. And then, I leaned close and I said, “Catalina—I know that you felt the strength of the blessing of God last night in the laying on of hands that we performed. But listen carefully to what I say. God will only work miracles with those who will try to help themselves.” I could see Catalina’s parents leaning closely over her shoulder to capture every word. And then I said, “Catalina, it is a miracle of God that we are communicating now.” For the first time she looked deeply into my eyes, smiled and weakly nodded that she agreed. I said, “You can feel the Spirit of the Lord in this very conversation.” She nodded again. “This miracle did not happen just with God. I spent many years learning how to speak this language. God is using that work that I did for the miracle of our communication now. The same is true with yourself. The miracle of God is there, but you must eat, drink, and walk for His miraculous healing power to be effective.” During that conversation I could see the light come into her face and I leaned back and pretended to look out the window. Smiling, I said, “Catalina, there are many young men out there with flowers waiting to see you walk again.” She laughed. I said, “There must be fifty young men out there. Let’s walk.” She got up and went out into the sunshine. There stood Joseph with his puppet, I indicated the puppet to Catalina and said, “Oh, I am sorry, I

must have miscounted. There are not fifty, there is only one, and there he is (indicating the puppet that Joseph was holding).” For the first time I heard her laugh and it sounded like wind chimes. This in turn caused all of her family to begin to laugh and we all celebrated with happiness and tears. They shared their joy with us in gifts of sodas and gave our two ladies handmade embroidered tortilla covers. We hugged one another as we departed, wishing her well, and making our way back to the square. Most of the group returned to the vehicles and then to Tuxtepec. Forrest and I remained in town for a little while waiting for the landowner, Senor A, to return to his home later that afternoon.

Forrest and I went to a store in town that was owned by the landowner's wife. There we found the owner and his wife and we then proceeded to gain permission yet again this year for access to the hill through his fields. As we conversed, Senor A began inquiring about our beliefs. Being an educated person he could not understand why we thought that the polytheistic Mayas could possibly ever have been Christians. Once again, I began telling the story of the relationship between the Popol Vuh, the Book of Mormon, and the Hill Cumorah. He was indeed aware of the finding of many weapons in the area. He was also aware of the legends of sacred writings being hidden in the hill. So, he was concerned that if these things were found, what would happen to his land that gives access to this area. My response was to inform him, as I had done the Mayor, about the Coxca agreement. As with the Mayor, I tried to make clear that it was my attempt at keeping

the peoples possessions and land rights in tact. At this point he agreed and requested that I also become his advocate in the event of such a discovery. This seems strangely reminiscent of the event two days before when we visited Senor J to gain permission for access to his land that lies adjacent to Senor A and is necessary for us to use for access to the hill. Senor J had received Mike Brown and I on Saturday with extreme warmth and he said, “You do not need to come every year to ask permission. You may use my land as you wish, because you have always protected me and my belongings.”

The day closed with most of the group packing the items they needed for the climb up the mountain on Tuesday.

Most of Tuesday April 5, 2005 was spent with the logistics of moving backpacks, water, equipment, food supplies as well as people up the hill to base camp and cave camp. Base camp is located about halfway between the road and the foot of the cliffs on the skirts of Cumorah and usually takes a newcomer a good hour-and-a-half to climb the steep vertical incline from the road. It is accessible through several open fields and lies on a relatively level area at the edge of the jungle.

Cave camp is located at the base of the cliffs where we believe a plugged cave entrance exists. The pathway to this camp is through a much rougher jungle terrain. Every year this pathway must be reestablished with the use of machetes. As the pathway winds upward the incline gets steeper yet. The traveler is required to climb at least

forty-five minutes through and over several rock falls with some boulders easily reaching megalithic proportions, finally ending on a pile of rocks at the base of the cliffs where our camp is established. We established both camps for the sake of communication and supply lines.

Wednesday April 6, 2005 began with great anticipation because it was to be the first full day of exploration. Some twenty-five years ago I had been led to an archaeological site which I came to believe to be Mormon's tomb. While that point has never been proved or disproved, I still desired to again find this site I had seen so many years ago. So, early in the afternoon Mike and I began to travel westward on the road and inquire of people who might know of someone who would have knowledge concerning the existence of this stone marker. Most of the people were afraid to talk to us. Finally I asked who is the oldest person in the area? I was told it was Rufino Ignacio. I was told that he was about a hundred years old. Upon hearing the name Ignacio, a very ancient, dusty memory chip in my brain lit up, for the name had a very familiar ring. Could this be the same person who had led me so many years before? I went to seek him out.

Upon arrival to his collection of huts, I met a man who was about forty-five years old. He welcomed Mike and me, and we sat on his porch. I began to tell him that I thought that the Ignacio that lived here who was very old could possibly have been the guide who led me years before. The man stated that indeed his father lived there and he was

seventy-four years old. If I wished I could ask him. I said okay. He called for his father and a man emerged from the rear of the hut. He came walking toward us with a very bad limp. He wore no shorts and I could see that he had a pacemaker. He sat down and we began to converse.

I asked him if he remembered guiding someone more than twenty years ago up to a place where there was a very ancient standing stone? This stone had Jalapa de Diaz and some early year in the 1600s carved on it. Rufino just looked at me. I could tell he was waiting. So, I continued. I said, "The standing stone was on a low platform. To the left was a creek. The creek was partially blocked which created a whirlpool where the 'jaicara' always spins." His eyes brightened, for indeed there had been such a whirlpool. I added that there was a stone bridge across a stone creek. A smile spread across his face and he said, "My friend. It is you. You describe everything perfectly. It was you and I, and that was before the road was here. There was only a horse trail." I responded, "Yes, it was all mud." We both laughed and slapped each other on the leg. Then he said, "It was two years before the road was paved. That means it was twenty-three years ago." I thought to myself that he was telling me that the two big events in his life were he leading me to the stone marker and the road being paved. I asked him, "Do you remember where that stone is?" He said, "Of course." His son said no, my father is not as strong as he used to be. Let us do it

tomorrow morning, then we can do it in the cool of the morning about 7 and it will not be so hard on my father, we can take him by horse.

I agreed and then Rufino said, “That land now belongs to the head of the union. I know there will be no problem for me, but we should get permission for you.” My response was, “We can bring a policeman from Jalapa to assure them that it is okay with the Mayor.” Rufino agreed. Then, Mike and I hotfooted it to town in our van to the police headquarters which we knew so well. There we informed the commander in charge of our intended trip in the morning. The commander stated that he would prefer to do it this same evening at 5 PM. That gave us only two hours to get everything ready so we had to check with Rufino to make sure that everything was okay with him. We drove back, asked Rufino and his son and they immediately agreed. Then on our way back to town we stopped at the gate entrance to the hill to radio Chad Hensley and Kevin Brown to come down to join us in this visit to the archaeological site.

At that point we drove back to town and got the police. It took time to make the arrangements. By 4:30 we left the Town Square and headed back toward the campsite. When we arrived at the gate of the landowner, Kevin and Chad were ready to join us and we traveled on to Rufino’s home. There we acquired Rufino and his son went to get the horse. We drove about half a mile down the road to the place where we parked the police vehicle and our own to access the hill and make the

ascent to the stone marker. Decades before it had been jungle, but now it was mostly cleared for pasture.

Unfortunately, not having my climbing boot on, I had to stay while I watched the entire group climb the 300 feet to where the site is located. About five minutes later Rufino's son arrived with the horse. He asked where his father was and I answered that he had already taken the group up to the site. The son shook his head and led the horse through the gate and up the hill. About a half an hour later, the whole group came down. They had found the stone and taken photographs. Rufino and I sat on the guardrail at the edge of the road. I asked him, "How do you feel my friend." He replied, "Just a good as I did when I took you the first time." I said, "You know life is funny. We both met many years ago because of this stone and we have had very different paths during the interceding years, but when the stone brings us back together more that twenty years later we are both crips. But the mileage between has been much good mileage." Rufino smiled and said, "Yes, much good mileage." We hugged each other and I said, "Here is two days wages." At first he did not wish to accept. I said, "Please take it my friend." It was wonderful to know that we had only previously spent some three or four hours together we had established a bond that had remained in tact for more the twenty years. Though no religious things were ever mentioned this bond was a Christian bond.

After Rufino and I had parted ways I had a chance to view photos of the stone on the way back to Tuxtepec. Things had changed over

twenty years. The five-foot high stone now only stood about thirty inches tall for much jungle deposit had accumulated around it. The creek was completely stagnate, and the stone bridge (a simple stone slab) was still in tact, but spanned an empty creek bed.

That night after devotions I thanked my Lord once again for the great blessings of great friendships, and for the guide and adventures and discoveries, and the miracles yet to come. Of course, I expressed hope that this being the 6th of April that we might find something on the hill that I would find out about tomorrow.

Thursday April 7, 2005 was the only day under 100 degrees because of the cloud cover with a light mist. As we traveled toward Jalapa from Tuxtepec, Mike informed me that he had received an e-mail from Tim Cox. The e-mail suggested to Mike that besides diabetes, the large numbers of child cataracts could be due to exposure to venereal disease at birth. After Mike's comments it occurred to me that something we might do to help us understand the reason for the unusual numbers of child cataracts could be to test the children and their parents for diabetes. Doing this would help take us a step closer to answering their medical needs. So upon arriving to where the group was camped, we radioed up to the camps to see what they needed. Since no needs were reported Mike and I went into town to offer the Mayor this suggested help for diabetes testing.

We explained to the Mayor that the idea would be to test the four to five hundred cataract children in their community for sugar diabetes. The Mayor totally agreed and had us coordinate with Fecundo and the Secretary of Health. We set the time to be at 4 PM on Tuesday April 12th. We made it perfectly clear that the people were to understand that this was not a function of the municipality, nor was it associated with any political party. They agreed to this reasoning.

Friday April 8, 2005 the cave camp group continued exploring for routes to the cave on the cliff. Mike and I went directly into Jalapa to make final arrangements for the proposed blood testing for diabetes. It was a busy day at the municipal office. We found Fecundo and the Secretary of Health and went with both to wait in line to speak with the Mayor. The Mayor had some type of meeting going on and he came out of his office to see me. I then told him that I was making sure that it was clear that we wanted no political motivation involved with the blood testing. He agreed. We told him that we preferred not to have the blood testing inside of the municipal building. The Mayor then took us downstairs to the Secretary of Health's office where we began making final arrangements. Cordially, the Mayor excused himself to return to his meeting. As we discussed the planning of the events and where to locate the site for testing, some ten minutes passed. Suddenly, Alvaro (the Mayor) showed up again and told me, "I have someone who speaks English in my office." I supposed that he needed help with a translation.

So, Mike and I, having finished our business, accompanied him to his office.

Upon entering his office we found ten very stoic gentlemen. We were introduced to each and realized that each was a Mayor representing the ten villages surrounding Jalapa de Diaz. The Mayor from San Andres could speak perfect English—he had studied at the University of Louisiana. He immediately informed us that we could not bring doctors to Jalapa without a permit from the Federal Health Department. His demeanor was antagonistic. I asked, “So what is the problem? I wish to clarify. I never said that any of us were doctors. None of us are going to prescribe any medicines or perform any operations.” Once again, he very harshly announced that we had to have a permit from the Federal Health Department. Of course, his whole conversation with me was in English. I perceived that this was to show off his English speaking abilities in front of the other Mayors. I also perceived that he wanted to demonstrate that he was more knowledgeable than the others and that he would protect them. In a glance, I could tell that “our” Mayor of Jalapa was a wallflower. I could see that he had no intention of entering into a verbal confrontation with the more adept Mayor of San Andres. I realized that I had to go into defense mode. This called for my Master’s protection. My diversionary tactic while I prayed was to change the subject. First, I suggested that we all go get a cup of coffee and then talk this over. Immediately, Mike and I were brought coffee. No one else had anything. As the coffee was being served, I turned to the Mayor and

began to talk to him as though no one else was in the room. As I pointed to the Mayor of San Andres with my thumb I said, “He reminds me of the Federales of Gobernacion that came to visit me on Monday. I shouldn’t be laughing about this (as I began laughing); they wanted to know if I wanted to sue Jalapa de Diaz for false arrest (I chuckled again). I told them that if I sued Jalapa all that I would probably obtain would be the municipality’s very stinky bathroom.” All Mayors, including Alvero, laughed. The only exception was the Mayor from San Andres who spoke English. My final comment was, “So if you wish this guy to do the medical assistance that is fine by me. He obviously thinks he knows much more than anyone else here.”

Immediately, the Mayor of San Andres rose to his feet and now in Spanish, so all would understand perfectly, “Before anyone can do any medical assistance one must have a permit.” Sitting in my chair with my coffee cup in one hand and my cane in the other I pounded the floor with my cane and exclaimed, “Echo.” (This is a Spanish expression for complete agreement). He said, “All of the doctors and nurses that come must have permits.” I pounded the floor and said, “Echo,” cheering him on. He said, “No kind of medical assistance can occur at anytime without such a permit.” I pounded the floor with each syllable and I said, “Echo and echo again.” He was now becoming perplexed because I was very strongly agreeing with everything he said. And, now with a weaker voice he said, “And now a permit is the first thing you need.” As I pounded the floor I loudly answered, “I do not echo that.” I very

calmly turned to Alvero and said, “Your short friend does not know what he is talking about, but if you wish him to do all this it saves me much work and I appreciate that.” And, in unison, Mike and I stood to leave. Immediately Alvero said, “No, please wait.” The stunned Mayor of San Andres said somewhat weaker, but unsure, “I am not wrong.” I turned to look at the Mayor of San Andres with as much fire as I could muster, “Tell me, to obtain a permit what do you need?” Emboldened, the San Andres Mayor answered, “The curriculums and the names of the doctors and nurses.” I said, “Ah-ha. Tell me. For the permit, do you have to report the amount of money to be spent?” He puffed out his chest and said “Of course.” And then I smiled, I turned my back on him and I said, “I rest my case. Before you get the permit you must raise the money. Before you raise the money you must know what doctors and nurses are coming. Before the doctors and nurses come there must be a demonstrated need. Do I make myself clear?” They all agreed, even the San Andres Mayor. I added, “There for, do what you will. If you can build the fire that I hope to build to get these people to come, fine.” Immediately, all Mayors, among themselves, began saying that I was correct—even the Mayor from San Andres. Then in unison they asked for us to help all of them also, even the Mayor from San Andres. My response was, “My first obligation is to my friend Alvero, if this works out then we can see if this can work for the others. I am not making a promise, I am only attempting to help.” As we began shaking hands of

every as we left the San Andres Mayor said in a low voice, “Thank you, you were right.”

Alvero then touched me on the shoulder. As I turned he said, “Share with them some of the things that you shared with me about the hill.” From his window we could see the hill and pointing to it I said, “In the hill are sacred writings that will change everything that is around you. Those writings are Christian in nature. They speak of Christ. Those writings will create a great mass of people who will want to know. All of this will overwhelm you.” Alvero said, “Tell them about the streets.” I continued, “I told Alvero that even if you had ten cars a day that visited for tourism it would completely clog your cities. This is true of all of your towns. But, if the Coxca agreement is in force you will have much support.” We then spent about twenty minutes talking about the Coxca agreement. All the Mayors then invited us to examine artifacts and archaeological sites in their areas to help further develop the details of the Coxca agreement. To a Mayor, without exception, we were requested to be advocates for all of the villages present with dealing with the forthcoming of the plates from Hill Cumorah. Mike and I left in marvel at what we had just experienced. We fully realized that events in the future may happen differently than what we presently foresee, but we know that the Spirit of the Lord was in that room and made these people realize that they could entrust us with their future. This was very humbling. Then Mike and I headed back to the gate entrance to the hill.

Shortly after our arrival at the hill the exploration team suffered an accident. The accident consisted of an avalanche of loose rock high on the hillside in which Forrest Liggett got struck on the thigh by a twenty-pound boulder that had fallen about forty feet. Though the blow knocked him out, fortunately his femur was not broken. I immediately sent two locals up to the cliffs to assist him off the hill. During the last half of his descent I climbed to meet him about halfway to base camp. From the point that we met arm in arm, both on cane, we both “crippled” down to the vehicles together. Fortunately, this was the worst injury of our whole expedition. We returned to Tuxtepec with Forrest in hand.

Saturday April 9, 2005 Mike and I went to the Hill and maintained contact throughout the day with the expedition teams as they finished scouring the side of the mountain looking for any possible avenue to the caves we had identified. At about 3 PM we left for Tuxtepec, planning to return the next day for the Sunday communion service.

At around 7 PM Tim Brown and Fred Elliott came into the hotel and surprised us greatly and reported that several backpacks and a medical kit had been stolen from off the hill....again. We had them eat and shower and when they felt energetic enough we made the trip to Jalapa that night. We left Tuxtepec at around 9 to 9:30 PM arriving in Jalapa between 10:30 and 11 PM. Upon arriving we drove directly to the police station and reported the theft of our belongings. I wrote a letter to the Mayor stating that without the medic kit we would not have

the supplies to be able to fulfill our obligation of blood testing as planned for Tuesday afternoon. The Police Chief was visibly upset. He said the Mayor will know first thing in the morning. I said, "If I was the Mayor I would want to know tonight." As we walked away I overheard the Police Chief say to his men, "They keep giving and giving and the people steal from them...."

We then went back to the gate to the hill to communicate to Base Camp as to what had happened. While we were doing this, the Police Chief did indeed go to a party where the Mayor was. He reported the incident and the Mayor commanded all the police force to immediately search for the thieves. At this party also was a newspaper reporter. The newspaper reporter overheard the conversation and accompanied the police in their search until well after midnight. That newspaper report can be found elsewhere. We (Tim, Fred and I) began our trip back to Tuxtepec for the night. On the way back we passed two trucks full of police with rifles going out to begin their search. That evening we were still all safe and we rested well.

Sunday April 10, 2005 in the morning we arrived at the hill. Our party consisted of Doris Mangum, Carol Brown, Tim Brown, Fred Elliott, Mike Brown and me, and we all begin our ascent to meet the ones who were still on the hill at Base Camp. Upon our arrival and a short rest, and many hugs and hellos, we began our Sunday Service. The service was to consist of communion, prayer and testimony. The

Spirit was present in power and strength throughout the service. Several gave powerful testimonies. I recounted many of the miraculous happenings that I have listed here. After our service we all felt completely renewed. After visiting with our friends for a while, some of us began our descent, while others returned to Cave Camp. We arrived at our vehicles and went to Jalapa to see if there was any news concerning our stolen items. There was none.

Upon arrival at the hotel desk in Tuxtepec, I received several newspapers that carried the story about our backpacks being stolen. The story included a quote from the Police Chief stating that we had saved a girl's life that had been snake bitten. The second quote in the paper was from Jalapa's Mayor who said, "These are good people who have come to help us. It is a terrible thing that has happened." I also received a phone call from the reporter who had written the story. He wished to have an interview. We agreed to have it the next morning.

Later that evening we had our nightly devotions. Mike and I sat in our room as Mike wrote and sent the daily e-mail. As almost every night we talked about the events that had transpired thus far and I realized that if we put the money into buying the glucose testing strips that we could still provide the blood testing of the children we had promised. With the new plan, I slept soundly.

Monday April 11, 2005 after we finished our interview with the newspaper Mike and I hurried to Jalapa, found the Mayor, and told him

of our new plan so that we could still test the children. He seemed thrilled. He immediately called Fecundo, his second in command, to relay the news. Fecundo then took us to the Secretary of Health. The Secretary of Health then took us to the Health Center where we met with the Mayor's wife. There we again set up all the details for Tuesday. As we turned to leave we ran into our new friend, the Mayor of San Andres. He greeted us warmly. He then stated that he had heard that we had saved a girl's life that had been bitten by a venomous snake. He requested that we visit a girl from his own village who had just been bitten and taken to Tuxtepec for medical assistance. We agreed to do this. And after cordial good-byes we left the Health Center. After leaving I commented to Mike, "Isn't our Master wonderful? The very man who tried to stop us from blood testing at the meeting of the ten Mayors is now asking us to work a miracle with his people. Very apparently, his heart has been changed." Mike agreed and we both drew strength from this knowledge.

Now we went to the gate of the entrance to the hill and hired locals to help our people begin to break camps and bring all our supplies off the hill. By 5 PM our entire group—lock, stock, and barrel—were off the hill and heading toward Tuxtepec.

That evening at devotions we all expressed great gratitude to our Master for having protected us. We also expressed extreme gratitude for the many miracles wrought, for the many opportunities to testify, and for

the opportunity for each and every one of us to have been used for His purposes.

After devotions several of us traveled to the General Hospital in Tuxtepec to look in on the snake bitten girl from San Andres as we had promised the Mayor earlier that day. For all our efforts to locate her, the staff at the hospital could not help us in finding the young lady; either she had already checked out, or we had been sent to the wrong hospital. We traveled back to the hotel, bade each other goodnight and all slept well.

Tuesday April 12, 2005 we received the newspaper article from the interview I had granted the previous morning. The article was lengthy, comparatively speaking, and the facts were well represented. The group spent the morning relaxing and getting ready for the afternoon we planned to spend with the people of Jalapa. We began to gather at about 3 PM in downtown Jalapa. The policemen had not yet found our packs, but the officials had kept their word, and while somewhat disorganized they provided table and chairs on the plaza outside the palace library. Joseph began entertaining with his puppet and Scott began making his balloon wonders. We began taking the blood test and not one blind child was brought. The municipal authorities had fallen down on their job of informing the population. We tested approximately thirty-five people, and though the testing was welcome by those who were tested, it did not accomplish the original goal.

Never the less, the spirit in the center of town was great. The bonding with the people was intense. Here, I will relay only a few of the wonderful comments we received that day.

“Thank you for coming.”

“God bless you.”

“I appreciate what you are trying to do for my children.”

“Thank you for helping us.”

“You are wonderful people.”

“Please come again.”

“Come to my home and eat.”

“May God always be with you.”

I had lengthy conversation with ten or fifteen people. All were marvelous. We left the extra supplies with the Secretary of Health for the city, and then, since we had been invited we went to visit Catalina one last time before we left.

Upon arriving at Catalina’s house we were once again welcomed warmly. Catalina was up and doing well. There was no pain in her back or stomach. She had much less pain in her foot. And, her smile and her cheer were a big as ever. We visited with the family shortly and began to make the walk up the steep hill back to our vehicles. Throughout the several times that I had been at Catalina’s home her Grandmother had watched me from the corners of the room. I suspect that Grandmother could not speak Spanish. The last thing before I left, Grandmother held my face in her hands, said something in Mazatec, kissed me on the

cheek and gave me a big toothless grin. We needed no words to communicate. We were all satisfied on our travel back to Tuxtepec.

That night at devotions I recounted many of the blessings that our group had received. In thirty years of coming to this place, never have there been so many profound human relationships initiated. The Spirit has walked before me on other occasions in this place, and has removed dangers from my pathway. The Spirit has allowed deep human love to occur between others and I in this area. The Spirit has protected me while being macheteed, or bound, or taken captive. The Spirit has protected me from jaguar, giant centipede, fer-de-lance, and others. The Spirit has walked both silently and quite loudly with me, but this year was different from all the years before.

This year, the Spirit opened locked doors; tore down thick walls, opened closed ears, and touched hardened hearts. No Hollywood writer could have written the dynamics and drama that was displayed before me during this week and a half. No one would believe scripts that would have a town ask a stranger to be its advocate when fearing him only days before, much less ten towns; much less members of the federal government. All this and yet have the testimony of who we are (Community of Christ) and what we believe (the plates in Hill Cumorah) and the significance of the two published on the front page of the main newspaper. More people heard our testimony this year than in all the thirty years before combined. That, my brothers and sisters, is the Lord at work.