

2011 in Retrospect, 33.0

Dear and good friends,

Greetings from central Colombia. We've spent most of our time here enjoying temperatures in the 70's and 80's—the high end of that is a bit warm to my liking, but I won't complain much. Besides, many of you are in Ohio where the days are getting perceptibly longer (I hear), and in less than four months, you all might be enjoying the same weather that we are—if winter doesn't linger as it usually does. So don't despair.

If my math is right, this is the 33rd year that we've sent out a year-end Retrospect. It's a lot easier now than it was when we used to have to print them and address envelopes. Many of you have been behind us for lo these many years and we're both humbled and thankful for your perseverance and the Lord's faithfulness. And for those of you who have joined since, thank you as well.

2011 was a wild ride in many places around the world. Repercussions from the 9.0 earthquake and tsunami in Japan continue to be in the news almost a year after the initial devastation. The “Arab spring” was a clear misnomer as unrest in virtually the entire Muslim world made headlines throughout the year, not just in the spring.



The death of Steve Jobs highlights just how far we've come in the electronic age, as all of us have been influenced directly or indirectly by his cool and user-friendly machines. I report this sadly as I type out my comments on my MacBook Pro, a compact marvel of Jobs' vision and ingenuity.

The 2011 Nobel Peace Prize was shared by three indomitable women who refused to be silenced under almost unbearable pressure to conform in their home countries of Libya and Yemen. Indeed Time Magazine labeled 2011 the “Year of the Protestor” as a nod to those who won the Peace Prize and also to the Occupy Wall Street groups that sort of remind us of the 60's—perhaps with less idealism.

I have nothing to say about Cleveland sports in 2011 as the Indians, Browns and Cavaliers all collapsed. But hey, Cleveland is my hometown. I've learned to live with disappointment.

2011 was a bit of a ride for Nan and me as well—if not an entirely wild one. One of the more sobering thoughts of 2011 is that we both turned 60. When we're all together as a

family of five, I've been asked if I have four adult children. It's a bit embarrassing, but I'm glad they ask me and not Nan. Nonetheless, we are so very grateful for the Lord's faithfulness and providence for these many years.



The year kicked off in early January in the Amazon jungle as we returned for the second semester of CLAVE, a training program for 17 indigenous students that I taught in and directed. This ended in early March and the University where we held the training has asked us to keep it going as an annual course offering, something that I think will have to fall to them.

We can advise them and maybe even help them set up a

program, but we don't have the man and womanpower to do it for them. That's really not a good idea anyway. So the program that they would love us to do again for them is not being considered. At the end of CLAVE I was accepted as a Fulbright "Senior Specialist," which is a US government scholarship program set up to help provide advisory support to foreign universities in order to help them achieve local goals. In this case, their goals are related to the linguistic training of indigenous students, something that we as a couple as well as we as an organization are very interested in. So we're hoping that we can work together with Peruvian scholars and university administrators to come up with a program that the Fulbright people might accept. The Fulbright situation doesn't change our relationship with SIL or Wycliffe. When we have such opportunities that are directed toward indigenous people, literacy and linguistics, we think it is important to collaborate in order to help train readers and teachers who care about their native languages, and can teach others. Our time in this project would be limited to about three weeks—planning only, not doing. I hope it happens.

This picture is of Calip a native speaker of Quechua, the language of the Inca. He was a student of ours last year in the Peruvian jungle, where he got started on these booklets. He has since published them with the help and financing of a local indigenous literacy organization. He has returned this year as one of our instructors. What goes around comes around. Although he grew up in a home with a dirt floor, Calip is very good with computers and he helps our students see that this kind of technology is not just for speakers of English and Spanish.



After a brief time at home, Nan and I returned to Peru, but not to the jungle, this time. Actually, we work in two ministries—both under the administration of SIL International, the translation organization that we have worked with for almost 35 years. CLAVE is aimed directly at speakers of indigenous languages. The training lasts for 4 months each year (late October to early March with a few weeks of Christmas break). Our students then return home to enthusiastically promote the speaking and reading and writing of their native languages. We think this is valuable, because a person's native language is what he or she understands best. If they are to understand the message of hope that the Scriptures offer, they need to hear it in their first language, NOT in the language that has been used to subjugate them and oppress them.

Perhaps these two photographs will give you an idea what I mean.



The man on the left is Diego. He is a native speaker of Arhuaco and he is one of our students, a pastor, and community leader. The man on the right is also an Arhuaco. He has the same woven cap and tunic, the same bag slung to his right side, the same long hair (Diego's is gathered in a pony tail) and many of the same physical features. But if you look closely, you see that the man on the right is tied with two strong ropes. He is a slave. This sepia chrome photo was taken over 120 years ago. He was tied up by people who were taught that he had no soul and no civilization and could therefore be

considered an animal. Diego knows this. Why would he bow to anything that comes to him in Spanish? Does God side with the oppressors? Is Spanish the only language that matters? I heard a man once in Guatemala say that the Indians don't speak normal languages like Spanish and English, but they communicate in primal grunts and groans like animals. You can imagine what the native-language Scriptures mean to Diego, and so many others like him, that Christ purchased with his blood people "from every tribe and language and people and nation." Jesus paid the same price for Arhuacos as He paid

for gringos and Latinos. God has “made them to be a Kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10). As hard as it was for Jews and Gentiles to come to understand that God had called them to unity in spite of two thousand years of animosity and racism, Diego is in the same situation today, some 2,000 years later. Can faith and forgiveness overcome these cultural and racist ideas? Paul taught—and the record of early Church in Acts showed that this can indeed happen.

But if the only access to this message is through Spanish, or English, or Arabic, or Mandarin, and not through one’s heart language, the whole enterprise breaks down, and all our pronouncements about the intimacy of God are deemed hollow, since He doesn’t even speak our language. How intimate is a God like that who can speak only the major languages of the world? That said, Nan and I spend four months a year working directly with indigenous people encouraging them and helping to train them to produce materials in their own languages which we trust will raise awareness of reading and writing, which will enable and motivate people to read the Scriptures.

The other thing we do with SIL is called CILTA, which I co-direct. CILTA was set up to train Latinos who are planning to get involved in cross-cultural ministry. The training takes place on the campus of a Peruvian university in Lima. The program is in its tenth year, and Nan and I are starting our 7th. Here’s a picture of the 2011 group, our largest ever.



After first semester CILTA was over, Nan and I returned to Ohio for a few months. I was able to paint our century home in Ashland, which I really enjoyed doing, and we had a great break with family and friends.

In October we headed back to Latin America, this time to Colombia, where I am presently directing our third annual CLAVE course. We are in a lovely part of the country, the Eastern Plains. I jog in the afternoons and I usually cross a small creek in a dark hollow that is always dense with jungle plants, heavy humidity and lots of mud. For some odd reason it reminds me of an old 50's horror movie I once saw with my brothers about a deranged zoology professor who lives in the bayou and turns his grad students into alligator people. So I try to scurry over the creek as quickly as possible. Don't remind my two brothers of the movie. They still think it was a documentary.

We had 28 students first semester and 22 now. As always, it has been a privilege to work with such motivated and skilled indigenous people. There are speakers of 14 languages present, and the language of instruction is...Spanish.



We hope very soon to have our first CLAVE baby ever. Juan, the guy to the

far right in this picture and his wife are expecting their third child probably before I finish this edition of the Retrospect (baby girl, Salome, born on Jan. 12). You might recall that last year we asked for prayer for Christian members of the Kogi tribe in Colombia. They were being persecuted and even tortured for their Christian faith in order to get them to recant and come back to the traditional religion of the tribe. Juan is one of the Christian leaders of that group. It has been confounding to tribal leaders that the Christians are so in favor of Kogi language and culture, while rejecting traditional religion. At the same time, many of the adolescent members of the tribe are turning to drugs, pornography, waywardness and full scale Western culture. The solid witness of believers and their commitment to so much that is Kogi has perplexed the tribal elders. I've seen this a number of times in the past. For example, while I was at Ohio State, we saw a documentary about how a linguist was working to bring back Miami, an indigenous language of the Midwest (as in Miami University of Ohio), now without a single native speaker. Part of the video featured people singing in Miami. It was a group of golden agers singing Christian hymns in the language of their grandparents. It often is the case that believers are those most interested in the maintenance and promotion of their native languages. So while they persecute Christians, Kogi leaders also realize that they are

persecuting the very ones who are most active in language appreciation and maintenance, something that they themselves are working toward. It's a complex world we live in.

Home has been good. Nan continues to be my best friend. She is the CLAVE and CILTA nurse and she rides herd on the program finances as well. These are confusing to me, although I work at it when she's not here. The Colombian exchange rate is almost 2,000 pesos to the dollar, so Nan keeps tabs on a budget of millions of pesos, which is duly impressive, and a huge help to me. When she's with her folks or helping with the grandkids and I'm left to check on the finances myself, I am reminded how much she really does behind the scenes to keep these programs moving forward. Nan and her sisters are helping their folks live independently. Grandpa says he won't leave the farm, no matter what, so Nan helps with banking, paperwork, errands and lots more.

The twins are well and tumbling toward three years old. Here they pose as Mario and Luigi. I suppose they could pass as Mario-and-Luigi Italians, although they have no lack of potential nationalities: Peruvian, Guatemalan and US.



Molly and Eden are well also. Note here that the two have identical hair color, although Molly has the bluer eyes—like Nancy. Molly continues to work part time on an organic farm near Asheville and she also does Spanish-English translation for some local health-care agencies. This has expanded some to local schools where she helps Spanish-speaking parents understand what's going on in parent-teacher conferences. She may also try her hand at legal translation, which is more technical. She lives about a four-hour drive from both Elisa (in Raleigh) and Isaac (in Atlanta).

Isaac is happy working at Yury and his brother's business in Atlanta, where he is a one-man operation. The band is on hold as one of the members became a first-time dad.

Isaac visited us in Peru in 2011. It was great to have him on our turf. His visit included April Fool's Day, which he and Nan and I enjoyed a lot—at least Nan and I did.

Here Isaac gets a quick computer lesson from the boys.



So what's ahead in 2012? You might know that the "long count" Mayan calendar runs out on the winter solstice of this year, December 21, having started this cycle in 3114 before Christ. I know of no Maya that live by this calendar and most are unaware of the different counts and cycles that the ancient Maya practiced. Some modern-day Mayan priests use the "short calendar" to divine the best days for marriage, planting crops and making big decisions, but the long calendar goes far beyond anyone's daily interests. Nonetheless, there is a sense in Mayan culture—both modern and primeval—of order coming out of chaos, similar to what Genesis teaches about God forming the working universe out of that which was formless and void. Whether that happens this year or some time later is God's jurisdiction, and I don't have an opinion as to when that will be. Either way our response should be the same—to live fully, and fully conscious of our Lord in every way.

2012 is also Olympic year. The Games will be held in London. Can Jamaican Usain "Lightning" Bolt lower his world records in the 100m (9.58) and the 200m (19.19)? To be that fast for that long (he's been winning and setting records for almost ten years) is truly amazing. I think age will take a bit of a toll on Bolt, and I predict that gold will go to someone else. But 9.58 for the 100 meters is really, really fast. This year's victor may not run that fast.

2012 promises to be a year when world political structures will be sorely tested. Aside from presidential primaries and elections in the US and an unraveling European Union, a new ruler has come to power in North Korea, widespread Muslim unrest continues both nationally and internationally, and a nuclear Iran gives everyone cause for alarm. About twenty years ago I met a man who worked in "government intelligence." That's all he would say. Although he added that the world's flashpoint was not the Middle East, but North Korea. Maybe we'll learn something about that in 2012.

2012 is also a leap year, so whatever we have to look forward to, we'll have an extra day of it, as God allows.

We're grateful for your prayers and interest. May God prosper your lives and faith in 2012.

Best,

Wes and Nancy Collins

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Nan rides tall in the saddle in Trujillo, Peru, home of the famous caballos de paso.



Eden helps Molly sort organic tomatoes.



Elisa, Yury, Jacob and Lucas Santana.



Nancy and Isaac in Lima.