

2020 in Retrospect

It has certainly been an eventful year. It started and ended with politics—President Trump's impeachment in January and the November election which refuses to go away, almost as if it had a life of its own.

Hurricanes battered the Americas, especially Central America as both Eta and Iota caused extensive damage, particularly in the steep mountain trails and the mud-walled, water-saturated homes of Honduras and parts of Guatemala. At the same time, fires burned out of control in the western US.

In May, Santana Leather Repair in Atlanta was looted. Hundreds of pairs of shoes and handbags were stolen or destroyed. Who is Santana, you might ask? Elisa, our firstborn, is married to Yury Santana. He and his brother have a leather repair company and our son, Isaac, manages the Santana Atlanta store. The street-level business was ransacked by rioters.

Around the same time, COVID-19 raised its ugly head and as of now, over 2,000,000 people have died around the world from COVID-related symptoms.

As the government called on Americans to stay home in order to thwart transmission of the pandemic, millions of people were laid off, or furloughed. Overnight, students became homeschooled and many university classes became virtual. Thousands of businesses were shuttered. The government pumped two trillion dollars into the economy so businesses could keep their employees on the job, and off the dole, but as stockpiles and resources dwindled two trillion dollars hasn't been enough (That's \$2,000,000,000,000!).

I get the feeling, reading Revelation, that part of the point of all this is to show us that it can really happen. Bible scholars (as well as people on the street) sometimes consider these Biblical teachings to be allegory, while others think of them as myth. I wouldn't bet against God. Something is brewing.

I finished my teaching at CILTA early last year, except for an occasional request to give a lecture on zoom. I had taught at Ricardo Palma University in Lima, Peru since 2006. Many of my former students now work in cross-cultural ministry in Latin America and around the world. Nancy and I have worked with Wycliffe Bible Translators since 1977. I plan to retire mid-year. Nancy retired from Wycliffe a few years ago. She now helps keep the books at Santana Leather Care's home office in Raleigh. She also helps homeschool Elisa's daughter, Nadia.

Our former work in Guatemala now continues largely through the efforts of our colleague and former student, Byron Feliciano Témax. Byron is the nephew of Eberardo, for those of you who may remember him or his name. He was one of my dear Mam friends who helped me learn to speak and appreciate his language. Both Byron and Eberardo attended linguistics conferences with me and learned how their language works and how beautiful it is. They were instrumental

in the resurgence of Mam as a spoken and studied language in the Comitancillo area of Guatemala. Eberardo died while I was still studying at Ohio State. He is sorely missed even now.

Byron is very much alive. He has become a well-known Mam personality, giving talks and teaching Mam linguistics and literacy, while continuing to pastor a growing church. He hosts a Mam radio program and has been active as a voice to help keep his people safe in the midst of the pandemic.

Listen to Byron encouraging some of the people calling in to his radio program:

https://youtu.be/I2rDbQe_k6Q



Byron told me some of the ways he engages his people with programs promoting Bible reading in Mam:

1. Choose a Bible portion, illustrate it, write out the verse and send it to the radio station for display on WhatsApp.
2. Prepare and sing a Mam hymn on the radio with or without accompaniment.
3. A group agrees to send each other Mam Biblical text messages every day for a week.
4. One week before a group meeting on WhatsApp, participants choose a Scripture portion, read it daily and then ask each other questions about the text on the air.
5. Answer random questions from the Bible in Mam.
6. Create Mam posters to be hung in public places.

Byron says that at first the Church only saw the obstacles that the pandemic was causing, but now many are taking stock of their lives and their priorities and spending time enjoying their families. They also appreciate an app where they can listen to the Scriptures digitally. Special thanks to those who helped finance Byron's ministry during the pandemic as well as those who work with him in Old-Testament translation and literacy. It is quite a team effort.

Besides the news above, I spent two months largely off my feet after having ankle replacement surgery. I'm extremely thankful to be married to a nurse and father to a physical therapist. I've been limping a long time—at least five years. My goal is to hike the trails of western North Carolina with Nancy and without pain. Nancy and I stayed with Elisa and her family while I was recovering. That was for over two months. Thanks to them all for the hospitality.

It has certainly been a year like no other.

I spent much of the year working on a book on the history of Mam writing and reading. This seems to me to be a valuable undertaking. By putting Mam on a pedestal, it encourages speakers to realize the importance of their language. When they read it, they are encouraged—particularly as they read the Scriptures. The Word of God in Mam hits home.

I'd also like to commend to you my older brother, Francis. Last year he completed 50 years of working for the Cleveland Public Library. I used to call him when he worked in the reference section and ask him questions like how many home runs did Leon Wagner hit for Cleveland in 1968. I would disguise my voice and send him running after almanacs for his "client." This probably got Fran started on library research and I in linguistics, as I tried to fool him with a feigned Irish accent. Congratulations!

I would like to ask you to pray for Zoey. She is the granddaughter of Nancy's sister, Darlene, and her husband Tom, and precious daughter to Aaron and Christina. Zoey is three years old and has retinoblastoma, a rare and pernicious cancer of the eye. The affected eye has been removed and there is a chance that, even so, the cancer may spread to the good eye and/or other parts of her body. May God have mercy on her young life and on her family.

A good number of you have collaborated with us in this ministry for over 40 years. We started young and now are old. God has been faithful and continues to be so. Raising a family in an Indian village and marveling at Nancy's medical gifts and meeting people from all over have been formative in our lives and faith.

Thank you for sharing much of this with us in one way or another.

Blessings to you all.

Wes and Nancy Collins