

"If I had it all to do over..."

By Steve Stutzman

The house was small... only about 12'x12', and mostly bare. There was a bench on one side, a small table and a bowl, and a hammock. On the bench sat an older, whitehaired, gentleman, slight of build..... rocking slightly back and forth. He looked up and smiled as we entered, welcoming us warmly.

I opened a guitar case, and placed the instrument in his hands. Perhaps even in eternity, I will remember the look that spread over his face.... a smile, lighting up the whole room, coming out of him, shining even thru eyes that saw nothing in the room.

We were in the room to visit, ten of us. We had traveled an hour up a beautiful river, surrounded by the rainforest, even stopping at a dockside store for a coke. We had started from a missionary home, already 20 minutes from town... and that town was a 4 hour trip from the city and the airport, including a 3 mile wide river crossing. I felt like we had truly reached the edge of the earth.

His fingers ran up and down the neck, and he tested the tuning. He strummed a few chords, and I could see in the bar-chord patterns he used that he had forgotten more about guitar than I ever knew.

On the way up the river, I learned the story; a blind man, very talented, living in the big city, learning to make a living playing in a band in bars. Eventually having a wife and a son, who he supported this way... until he met Jesus. That day his life changed... and the music changed.... and the old bar songs stopped working for him. No music, no money.... no money, no wife. And so, he ended up far back in, up a river, subsisting on whatever was given him by the already poor church folks.

But there was that smile..... and fingering the guitar, with a joy that could not be mistaken as human, he broke into a spontaneous song. I think I gave him the guitar, I don't remember for sure. But the words of his original song still echo thru the tears in my mind....." If I had it all to do over again, I'd choose Jesus....."