



# PCCR

PLAIN COMPASSION CRISIS RESPONSE



IRAQ

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2020



As I write this, I am somewhere over the Pacific. I am in a little aluminum crate 33,003 feet above the ocean and moving at a speed of 569 miles per hour. It will take me approximately 12 hours and 45 minutes to travel from Sydney, Australia to Los Angeles, California. In about 24 hours I will be in Orlando, Florida where I was a week ago. I marvel at the ease of travel nowadays and the how it has opened the world to us. In a week's time I traveled from Florida to Australia, attended a Mennonite church with Brad Eberly in Canowindra, NSW (New South Wales), drove south to Victoria, spent a night and a day there helping with fence repairs for a local farmer, drove to the coastal areas, spent a day there helping Farran with his fence and touring the hard-hit area in the mountain along the coast with Ian in preparation for the team to arrive the next day. Then I drove back to Sydney, got some administrative work done (with the internet, I can do office work even while in Australia) and then boarded a flight for home this morning. All in a week's time, eh mate?

Australia is a beautiful country. A country of wide-open plains, mountain ranges, and beautiful beaches. It's almost as big as the lower 48 states and yet the population is only about twice the population of Pennsylvania. Most people live along the coast line, especially the East side. It's here that the bushfires are the worst. Thousands of homes have been burned. Millions of acres have been lost. You can drive for hours through the mountains and all you see is burned trees stretching for miles and miles in all directions. Eastern Australia has been suffering from drought for two years. This has been an extra hot summer. All it took was a spark. And they had multiple sparks. Thankfully, the rains have now started and while the stock tanks (ponds) are still far below normal levels for this time of year, many of the fires are now under control or completely out. With all the dry grass burned up, the fresh green grass that has sprung up since the rain stands in stark contrast to the blackened fenceposts, trees and heaps of rubbish dotted across the landscape.

## MEET FARRAN TERLICH

This is Farran Terlich. He's a friend of Brad's that lost most of the buildings on his farm. Some of his fence is newer with metal posts but the older fence has some wooden posts. The grass fire burned them off or damaged them, allowing his cows to escape. Even now he's still having to chase cows that escape every so often until he's able to repair all his fences. He was fortunate that his house didn't burn completely but he lost his tractor, his parent's house, another house on the property, and multiple other sheds and barns. With the drought the last few years, things were tight before the fire. Now, things look bleak indeed.



*From here, we could see mountains in every direction. They were all burned.*



*One of the main posts, burned off at the ground. Cattle can simply push against the fence and walk over it.*




## MEET IAN BROWN

Ian Brown lives in the Eurobodalla area of southern New South Wales, Australia. When Ian got married, he married into the Richards family which has farmed this valley for generations. Ian and his wife spent a few years in the corporate world before returning to the farm where she was raised to continue the tradition of farming the land. On Christmas weekend Ian's children were all home for the holiday. About 2 am his daughters woke him and said "We gotta get outta here!" By that time, the brush fires were glowing red above the mountains behind the farm. Ian hooked up his little camper (caravan) and by the time he got to the other side of the valley, they could see the flames. Most of the houses in the valley were lost.

The 200-year-old farm house is gone. A lot of history in this valley is gone. Turned to ashes. Still, Ian is determined to rebuild. "I can go back to work if I have to," he says, shrugging. "This farm is my life. I spent my life building this. Now, it's all gone."

One thing the fire has done. It has made him question life. Is there a God? Does he care about what happens? And if so, why did He allow this? So many times, when disaster strikes, it gives us a unique opportunity to share the gospel with those who would otherwise be closed. I marvel at the fact that I was able to share my testimony of finding real, lasting hope in the midst of tragedy and grief by placing my faith in Jesus Christ. Please pray for Ian. His heart is open right now. Once again, God is using what satan means for evil as a way to touch people's hearts.

I have to think of some of Paul's journeys. How he suffered and almost died to take the gospel to those who had not yet heard. When I think of his journeys and compare them to the ease I can travel with, covering thousands and thousands of miles in just a week's time, I wonder; are we really taking advantage of the opportunities given to us? What will we say on judgement day when Jesus, ablaze in righteous glory, stands before the throne and asks us this question; "What did YOU do with the resources I provided for you? Did you do everything you could to fulfil the commission I gave when I was there? Or were you too busy using what I provided to build a comfortable life for yourself and your family?" - Mike Stoltzfus 







We are in the middle of adding several more classes at the community center. We plan to go from 40 students a day, to 150 students. It's taking a lot of effort, and hours of meetings to pull it off, however it seems to be moving forward. These classes will all be English classes. After that is going, we will check into adding a photography or a media class as well. The outcome of some of these decisions depend on what will bring the most personal impact, and job opportunities after graduation.

We expanded the Syrian border project from having 1 person there as an assistant, to having several people go in for sever hours 5 - 7 days a week and giving shoes, jackets, and milk formula to the people that are lacking these items. We are also supplying the kerosene for the heaters that are being used to keep the facility warm.

Another military outpost further south along the border asked us if we could supply several heaters, and kerosene for the facility at their location where they are also receiving some refugees. We provided 3 heaters, and kerosene, and will probably continue providing kerosene there for the rest of the winter.

We are doing our paperwork to have PCCR registered in the Kurdish held areas of Syria. That should go through next week sometime, and will give us easier access to all these Kurdish held areas in Syria. We don't have definite plans to go into Syria again, however we will probably be planning a trip coming in the near future. Some of the people fleeing the fighting in Idlib are traveling to the Kurdish areas. Our Syrian contacts are reporting on that as this new crisis unfolds. The area they are traveling into is about 10 hours west of the Iraqi border, so it would be at a different place than we travelled to the last two times we were in Syria. We are currently waiting, and watching what happens there.

Maribeth and I have a goal to have most of our responsibilities here handed over to somebody else by the end of 2020. That will allow us to not be as tied down here, but we could still stay involved at the level of our choosing. This would free us up to be better able to travel into places like Syria and Mosul.

Our team is experiencing God. We laugh together, cry together, pray together, worship together, and do life together. Most of us are experiencing God at a deeper level, and as a result people are being healed and set free from lifelong spiritual, and emotional issues. People are going from shut down, to experiencing joy, life, and freedom. Others are confessing, and repenting of their sins.

There is amazing transformation happening among the team. Each person is also being spiritually trained, and equipped. Specifically, on prayer, spiritual warfare, teamwork, the Holy Spirit, and how the culture of Heaven - Kingdom of God is designed to operate and function.

It's amazing to watch as God draws each one closer to Him as they surrender their life in service to Him. ~ Daniel Beiler



Hola! My name is April. Our family is serving as missionaries in Arauca, Colombia. Come along on an adventure with me!

Before coming down, we faced a lot of opposition. Mainly, it was fear. See, in Colombia there are a lot of guerrillas, especially in and around Arauca where we were headed. Other missionaries were telling us not to go there because it isn't safe. Still, we felt called and knew that God would protect us.

We left for Colombia on October 31 with three other team members. The names of the volunteers were as follows: Elijah, Sarah, and Marilyn. Landra flew into Bogota from Mexico a few hours before us and travelled to Arauca with us.

But first, we arrived at the Philadelphia airport at 3:00 A.M.... We flew Air Canada up to Toronto where we had an eight-hour layover. I despise long layovers. Three hours maybe but eight?! It was quite boring because I do not sleep in airports. When we flew into Bogota it was 1:00 A.M. and I was pooped. We had a twenty-one-hour layover there but thankfully our Colombian contact took us to his house where he invited us to sleep. The team stayed in his house for the rest of the night. He then took our family to a nearby motel so we could sleep, too. Our flight to Arauca left at 7:00 P.M. and lasted one hour.

When we arrived all the fear we felt melted away like snow when the sun shines. We got taxis to our new house while a truck took our luggage. The neighbors were standing outside and were friendly. We felt comfortable.

The first thing that hit us was the heat. We went from jacket/coat weather to sweaty weather. I would be sitting in worship and feel the sweat trickle down my back.

This city is small compared to Bogota. It is not as dangerous as some people said it would be. The military has a good grip there and if there are any guerrillas they live like civilians. If there would be an uprising the military would quickly step in to stop it. God protects us! We can safely walk to the stores.

You do not see wild animals in the city although you do see lots of iguanas. We have one in our courtyard. His name is Nicodemus because he sneaks around. He is a very impressive male. He is very bold and will come close unless we frighten him by chasing him. The language here is Spanish. The Spanish here seems to be mixed with Italian. Not knowing Spanish is very frustrating. In the Bogota airport, they don't even speak much English. Before going to Colombia, I had a presupposition that everyone who spoke Spanish

would know some English. That was false. I only know two people in Arauca that know enough of English to hold a long conversation. Did that give me a negative view? No. It gave me more determination to learn the language.

The food is loaded with carbohydrates. A typical Colombian meal will include at least one type of bread at every meal. The biggest meal of the day is lunch. You have not eaten if you have not had soup. The soup differs from whole fish to egg soup. Colombians enjoy fresh or salty cheese. They enjoy it so much they will even put it on their ice cream sundaes.

You might be asking, "What do you do there?" Well, we help with the people who are devastated by the Venezuelan crisis. Venezuela was a prosperous country with oil rich land but the government was socialist. About six years ago the economy started to decline. Last year things turned desperate. The people are devastated and the people will walk to find work and food. Some will even walk to Peru or further. Imagine with me if you needed to walk the distance from Indianapolis to the West Coast to find food all the while carrying a pack on your back and your children beside you. We help by distributing hayacas which is the same thing as tamales, and water. We are going to start a shelter so that the walkers have a safe place to spend the night.

I enjoy ministry in the Venezuelan village. The part we frequent the most is called April 20 just like my birthday and my name. It is filled with tin huts with occasional brick structures. My favorite things to do there are playing Ring Around the Rosie or tag with the children as well as visiting and praying with the people.

We have a lot of fun times with the team. Especially when my aunt Marilyn has had tinto (black coffee loaded with sugar) in the afternoon. The caffeine induces a jovial state of mind. When that happens, get prepared for fun. ~ continued on next page






We have some good friends that we like to spend time with. Their names are Jose and Jenni. They are from Venezuela. Three years ago, they left and started their own restaurant in Arauca. We have fun going to their place and eating cachapas, riding motorcycle, and playing soccer. We also invite them to our house frequently.

Birthdays are special for our team. We normally celebrate with cake and then do something special. For one of the girl's birthdays we went horseback riding which was fun until my horse decided to gallop into the trees.

The people are beautiful. Their main religion is Catholic but people are tired of it and are searching for more meaning.

The scariest thing I experienced happened on Dec. 24. We were in a park singing and handing out hayacas and water. When we were about to leave, we saw a woman lying on the ground weeping. Suddenly, she started to shake violently. Dad and the team went over and found out that she was demon possessed. They went over to help her. They prayed, kept her still while she was shaking, held her mouth open so she doesn't choke, and sang. Somebody called the police and they took her to the hospital.

God has asked us to serve Him longer in Colombia than we had thought at first. As a result, we will be in Colombia for at least one year. 

Written by Conrad and Darlene's thirteen-year-old daughter, April, that is serving with her family in Colombia.



We were stuck. We couldn't go back. We couldn't go forward. What now?

At this point exhaustion finally caught up to me and I collapsed. Literally. My legs just wouldn't hold my weight anymore and folded beneath me. By this time I didn't even care. We had exhausted out very last hope and there was no reason to even keep trying. Dimly, I heard Papa tell Mother; "Stay here!"

"Of course," I thought, "Where else would we go? Even god has forgotten us!" As I lay there, struggling to make sense of what would happen to us now, exhaustion took over and I fell asleep.

It didn't seem long till I was being lifted up in Papa's strong arms. "hang on, son," he said, "I found a place we can sleep." He carried me through the throng of people, Mom and the rest following, until we were away from the crowd. Here we simply lay down on the open ground and fell asleep. The sandy, rocky ground was far from a soft bed but we were so utterly exhausted that we slept anyway. I didn't wake until the hot sun beat on my face and I tried to turn around so I could sleep more. When I rolled to my side, the rough ground rudely reminded me where I was and I sat up sleepily, looking around.

Mom was sitting crosslegged, holding a shawl to shield Dalal's face from the sun so she could get more rest. I sat and watched for a bit. Mom's face seemed frozen. She sat motionless, staring into space in a way that left me feeling unsettled, somehow. I looked around and saw Papa coming towards us. He didn't say anything, just walked up and sat down wearily besides Mama. When she looked at him he simply shook his head. He didn't have to speak. I knew without asking what he meant, there was no place for us to go.

We simply sat there, staring at the dirt or off into the distance for what seemed like hours until Dalal awoke. Then we simply started walking, joining the crowd of people that stretched farther than we could see, walking slowly down the dusty road, our feet kicking up small clouds of dust as we walked. We didn't know where we were going, we simply knew we couldn't stay here. We hadn't had a single drop of water for a long, long time and unless we found some soon, we would die.

And so we walked, simply following the people in front of us. Our water bottles had long run dry. Even our hopes seemed to have run out. The only reason I had to put one foot in front of the other was the thought that surely, sooner or later, we would find water.

It wasn't until the sun was high in the sky, beating down mercilessly, that we crested a hill and saw a small village in the distance. Weary as we were, our footsteps picked up speed as we walked into the little village. Upon entering the outskirts, we saw the most welcome sight of my entire life; a water truck! He was backed up to the street and was filling jugs of water for the dry, dusty travelers as fast as he could. The water was warm and stale, and absolutely delicious, but I couldn't drink more than a few swallows. My stomach had shrunk and reacted violently to the first few swallows.

We stayed in the little village for two days. Papa had grabbed all the cash in the house when we ran and while it wasn't much, it was enough for us to finally get some food. However, we weren't able to find lodging as every possible place was already filled to overflowing. We were able to find a few blankets and we simply spread them out wherever we could find a bit of shelter and slept. But now we were faced with a different problem. While the days were still hot, the night were quickly turning cold. We also knew that any day now, the rains would come, maybe even snow. We simply had to find shelter before that happened. Papa kept walking the streets, looking for anyone who would take us in but while the people were all friendly and some of them gave us food and water, there simply wasn't any room left for refugees. On the third day we started out again.

We had heard that there was a refugee camp in Dohuk where we might be able to find a place. It would be a tent but that was better than nothing, so we started walking. This time we walked during the day and tried to find shelter from the cold during the night. The third night of walking the rains started. We were far from any village so we simply sat beside the road, wrapped the two blankets around us the best we could and stretched a thin piece of that we had found over our heads the best we could. Thankfully the rain didn't last long and we were able to walk to a small village where we huddled under a storefront porch for the night. We walked for ten days before we were able to catch a ride in the back of an empty produce truck. It stank of rotting vegetables but we didn't care, we were just glad for the ride. After about an hour the driver dropped us off along the road and we walked the last mile to the refugee camp.

It was early afternoon, overcast and cloudy, with a slight wind blowing when we finally made it to the refugee camp only to be told, once again, that there was no room. Papa went in to talk to the guy in charge and when he came back out his once strong face looked like even he was ready to give up. "Well," he said, "They told me that there's a village about a mile away where there are some empty houses. Come, maybe we can find a place there. It's either that or walking into the city and trying to find something there. I think we'd have a better chance in the village." I've often wondered how different our life would be today if we would've chosen to go into the city.

This is their story and my goal is to write it as factual as possible with the limited detail I have. Names have been changed for safety reasons and I have taken liberty to add details as I have seen fit in order to create a readable story while maintaining the integrity of the account as told to me. — Mike

## PLAIN COMPASSION CRISIS RESPONSE

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## HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

- Support us financially.
- Volunteer to help
- Remember Plain Compassion Crisis Response in your will.

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

### MIDDLE EAST

- We are looking for a young man to lead the project in Syria. Previous experience with PCCR or a similar organization is required. This is a very dangerous field and safe return is not guaranteed.
- We are looking for long term volunteers (six months or more) to teach English in the Community Center. Teaching experience or TESOL certification is needed. We can assist with obtaining TESOL certification.

### COLOMBIA

- One month (or longer) volunteers to serve in street ministry and assisting with general duties.
- Girls to help in the kitchen preparing meals, cleaning, doing general housework and assisting with schooling Conrad's five children.
- A young man to serve long-term (6 months +) as a team leader
- Another couple to join Conrad and Darlene as they serve and assist them with caring for the needs of teams and running the day to day operations.
- As always, Spanish speaking volunteers are greatly needed in Colombia.



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