

FR. STEVE BAUMBUSCH ,PIME

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c/o Bishop's Residence • Guadalupe Center - Balindog • 9400 Kidapawan
N. Cotabato, PHILIPPINES

January 30, 2000

Dear Mom and Dad,

Well, I did it again! On Friday, it began to rain and continued for almost 24 straight hours, until noon on Saturday. I knew that the rivers would be high, but was hoping that they wouldn't be too bad, since the rest of Saturday was clear. I had to go to a barrio called Natividad for Sunday Mass, and then to Colundibus for a memorial Mass (1st anniversary of death) for a father and child who were killed when a mortar they had found and taken into their house (of course thinking it was nonactive) exploded.

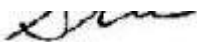
Both barrios are on the other side of a river from Columbio. The water was deeper than usual, but I watched as several vehicles made it across and followed their path. No problem. Coming back home, however, I chose the wrong way across (just as I had done in Maligaya before). A few feet further to the left and I wouldn't have had any problem. As it was, just a couple of yards from the far shore the river deepened quite a bit and the engine stalled out. A truck came across a few minutes later and pulled us out. I waited a while and then tried to start the engine. It started after a few attempts, and we set off again, thanking the Lord...too soon as it turned out.

After about half a mile, I started losing power and the engine light came on. I pulled off the road and shut it down, afraid that I would damage the engine again (the brand new engine, with just over 1,000 kilometers on it!). As luck (or Providence) would have it, a mechanic happened to be passing by and saw me with the hood up. He stopped and checked things out, opening up the air filter, to find that there was water inside. After wiping things dry, he removed the air filter and told me to try it. A-OK, no warning light. We were only a couple of kilometers away from Columbio, so he said it would be alright to drive there without the air filter; then it would just be a matter of drying out the filter before replacing it.

I'm writing now just after having replaced the dried out filter. No warning light when I started it up. I plan to go to Kidapawan later this afternoon, and e-mail this tomorrow, so if you get this letter on Sunday (your time), you'll know that everything worked out OK. The mechanic, by the way, absolutely refused any money for his help. I told him I would say a rosary for his intentions, and he was happy with that.

One other mistake I've made recently: I told you about the custom of Manañitas on a person's birthday (rising early in the morning and going to "serenade" the person). Well, I joined in a couple of these, and now it seems that just about everyone expects that I will show up on their birthday. At least I learned one thing. A couple of times ago, the people told me that they were going to the person's house at 3:30am. So I dutifully dragged my carcass out of bed at 3:00, and was ready to go (already having downed two cups of coffee) by 3:30. Then I waited...and waited...and waited. Finally, around 4:45, they showed up to go to the person's house. So, since then, when I'm asked to participate, I tell them: you knock on my door and wake me up when you're ready to go. But really, I might just have to cut it out altogether. As you can imagine, in a parish of a few thousand people, it's always someone's birthday.

OK, I'm going to close for now, because some people are waiting for me to go Kidapawan, so I can drop them off at their barrio, which is on the way. Love you and miss you lots! Love,



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