



## Adventure is out there!

During these days of quarantine, people are watching movies more than ever. The other evening a parishioner here suggested I watch “Murphy’s War”, a 1971 movie starring Peter O’Toole filmed at some 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish forts 30 miles downriver on the Orinoco. The only version I could find on YouTube was in Japanese. I couldn’t understand a word and the movie wasn’t that great, but it was cool seeing the fort and the river.

Check it out! A more recent movie associated with our part of Venezuela is the 2009 Pixar movie UP. Rather



Left: Paradise Falls in the movie  
Right: Angel Falls, the real thing

than sell his home to make way for a high-rise apartment building, elderly Carl Fredricksen lifts his house from its foundation with 10,000 helium balloons and miraculously lands on a tabletop mountain next to Paradise Falls, the adventurous goal he and his recently deceased wife Ellie had shared their entire life together. The falls that inspired the movie is Angel Falls. The highest waterfall in the world at 3,210 feet (19 times higher than Niagara Falls and 60 times higher than Minnehaha Falls) including an uninterrupted descent of 2,650 feet, Angel Falls pours over the edge of one of several flat-topped mountains called “tepuis” in the Gran Sabana region of SE Venezuela. Over millions of years, erosion from wind and rain carved the near- vertical sides and strange rock formations in the mysterious uninhabited land above.

One would assume the falls got its name from the waters descending like an angel of God from on high, but they were actually named after a real-life adventurer, a bush pilot from Missouri named Jimmie Angel. Back in 1933, flying out of Ciudad Bolivar, the next city upriver from us on the Orinoco, he was the first person from the outside world to see the falls previously known only to native groups. Believing there might be deposits of gold (SE Venezuela is gold country), he returned four years later with his wife and two friends. Attempting to land on top of the tepui, his plane’s wheels mired inextricably in mud. The group climbed down the tepui and trekked 11 days to a native village. News of their adventure peaked international interest in the mysterious tepuis of the Gran Sabana, and the falls named, not for an angel of God but an adventurous bush pilot from Missouri.

The waters cascading from Angel Falls are part of the headwaters of the Caroni River. About 150 miles downstream from the falls, the Caroni flows into Lake Guri, a 1,640 sq. mi. reservoir backed up by the Guri Dam which began operating in 1978 as the highest capacity hydroelectric power plant in the world. The cool dark waters course another 60 miles to the Macagua Dam here in our city where, since 1961 they have provided power for thousands of homes and an extensive industrial sector.



After being discharged from Macagua, the Caroni plunges dramatically at Llovizna Falls and the broad Cachamay cataracts. Llovizna means “drizzle” or “mist”, and when waters levels are high, as they will be in the upcoming rainy season, you can feel the mist well over 1,000 feet away. La Llovizna is just five miles from our house. I love going over to see the falls, hike the tropical forest trails, hear the parrots sing, and watch the monkeys come down from their trees to beg treats from passersby.

On a rare occasion an Anaconda can be seen in the park ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6\\_Rsllsdfc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6_Rsllsdfc)) but I have not had the good fortune to see one. In case you check out the movie “Anaconda”, know that the real ones are not like those in the movie. Although great swimmers, their large size (16 ft. for the average female and 9 ft. for males) makes them slow and cumbersome on land. They are not aggressive, preferring to avoid people instead, but will attack if cornered and pestered by tourists too eager for a photo, so rangers remove anacondas whenever they find them in the park. Whenever they have appeared in our river-lying barrios, it’s been the anaconda, not the people, who ended up being the meal. Adventure is out there...but use your head to make it a good adventure!

### Points to ponder

What have been some of the best adventures of your life? What are some favorite places in this beautiful world God has created that you have visited or would like to visit some day?

*The Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis has staffed and supported parishes in the diocese of Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela since 1970. These “Did you know?” papers are designed to give you a better understanding of life in Venezuela and to strengthen connections between the parishes of the Archdiocese and their archdiocesan mission during our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. Please direct any comments or suggestions for future papers to Fr. Denny Dempsey at [ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org](mailto:ddempsey@churchofstdominic.org) or 651-368-7324.*