

# Brazil News



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Editorial

## **A Table in the Presence of Enemies**

Do a quick test. Read Psalm 23, phrase by phrase. Stop at the end of each and in just a few words think what the words mean to you. For example...

The Lord is my Shepherd... The Lord is my Heavenly guide here on earth...

I shall not want... He takes care of all my needs...

Now, here is what the little test is all about. What do you think where it says, Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies...?

Isn't it true that we sort of glide over this one? What enemies?

I just finished reading *An Invisible Thread*, by Laura Schroff (Howard Books). While some aspects of the lives of both the author and protagonist hardly fit into our mold of propriety, much can be learned from their story.

Those of us who have been raised in rural and small-town N America, who sincerely believe that all men are created equal, have difficulty accepting the fact that not all men, women and children live equal. Not in N America, and much less in the many underdeveloped nations of the world where the majority of the population often lives in abysmal poverty.

In our organized lives, we don't consider ourselves to be surrounded by enemies. At least not in the natural sense. David, a man of war, knew by experience what it meant to be surrounded by enemies intent on taking his life.

Enter Maurice.

To describe six year-old Maurice's life as hell is hardly hyperbole. In the author's words, "The boy is stuck in something like hell." He recently had to have his stomach pumped because of eating contaminated rat droppings. He lives with his dad in a filthy one-room apartment. He sleeps in the same bed with his stepbrothers, all of whom wet the bed. The stench is unbearable. The whole place smells of death. His mom has been absent for three months. When she does finally show up, he at first doesn't recognize

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her because she has lost all her teeth from smoking dope. The word “peace” is not included in his vocabulary.

Enter Laura Schroff.

Laura works in the advertising department of USA Today. She is in her thirties and very successful, bringing in millions of dollars of revenue annually for her employers.

Walking down the street near her Manhattan apartment, a filthy little boy extended his grimy hand, his sad eyes begging for a handout. “Excuse me, lady, do you have any spare change?” He obviously was hungry. Inured to such human tragedies, she spared the boy but a brief glance and continued walking. After a few steps she halted her stride on 56th Street. And for some reason which even she can’t define, returned to the boy.

The boy was Maurice, now 11 years old, although he didn’t look it. He has a “tiny body, sticks for arms, big round eyes.” He was filthy, his sneakers untied and his clothes nondescript. Yet, “there was a general sweetness about him.”

Extending his open palm, he repeated, “Excuse me, lady, do you have any spare change? I am hungry.”

On impulse, she said, “I’ll take you to McDonald’s and buy you lunch.”

Thus began their first dialogue—and a lifelong friendship.

The intersection of these two lives, of an upper class, wealthy, highly successful white woman with that of an undernourished black street urchin, is unusual, to say the least.

Just because Maurice was underprivileged didn’t mean he was unable to dream. He asked, “Can I have a cheeseburger?”

“Yes.”

“How about a Big Mac?”

“Okay.”

“And a Coke?”

“That’s fine.”

“Well, how about a thick chocolate shake and French fries?”

Laura assured the hungry boy he could have anything he wanted. Now she had a request.

“May I join you for lunch?”

The boy thought for just a bit and replied,

“Sure.”

And so it was that this sophisticated lady, showing not the slightest bit of embarrassment, walked into McDonald’s with a shabbily-dressed, dirty, ill-smelling eleven-year old panhandler, went to the counter and ordered a Big Mac, fries, thick chocolate shakes and Cokes for each.

This lunch engagement was repeated on a regular basis on the next 150 Mondays in a variety of restaurants.

The first encounter was somewhat awkward.

“Hi, I’m Laura.”

“I’m Maurice.”

Upon finishing the meal, Maurice asked,

“Where do you live?”

From the window Laura pointed to the majestic Symphony apartment. “That is where I live.”

The boy then proceeded to inform her that he lived in a welfare hotel on West 54th Street and Broadway—a mere two blocks from where she lived in luxury.

He asked about her job and in terms he could understand she described her daily routine. It turned out Laura was the first person he knew who had a job. This admission told her—and us—volumes about the hundreds of people who lived in the cramped, inhumane welfare hotel that Maurice called home. No one had a job. Survival depended on panhandling, drug pushing and outright criminal activities. It wasn’t until later that Laura discovered that even Maurice, yet a child, always carried a stolen razor-blade box cutter in the pocket of his sweatpants.

Even more amazing was the discovery that the person who Maurice feared most was his own dad, Morris, whose “profession” was that of a stick-up man. Not only did he rob strangers, but his own friends when the opportunity presented itself. Even when caught red-handed, his victims knew that silent acceptance of the loss was preferable to a prolonged stay in the hospital, or permanent residence in the cemetery.

A strange twist of fate merged the lives of Morris and “a spark plug named Darcella,” as the author denominates her. One of a brood of eleven, born to a single mother, Darcella didn’t hesitate to take on any perceived adversary, male or female. She seemed never to tire as she threw punches left and right. She was proud to wear the leather jacket that identified her as one of the few female members of the feared Tomahawks gang. It can hardly be said that fate smiled on Maurice when this union brought him into the world, third after two sisters, Celeste and LaToya.

A heavy drug user and alcoholic, Morris would come home late at night in a rage, verbally and physically assaulting his wife and children. He seemed to get pleasure out of slapping his children in the head. When Maurice would begin to whimper, he would shout, “Shut up, punk!” and strike him yet again.

The only relief the family could expect from the monster who terrorized their lives was when he would disappear for days with a girlfriend. During one of these absences Darcella decided enough was enough and relocated to a housing complex with 1,700 “apartments” that housed thousands of homeless like so many animals in a cage.

Upon returning, it didn’t take long for Morris to find his family. He burst into the apartment declaring his love for his wife and demanding how she could possibly leave him. When she refused to have him back, he hauled off and hit Darcella in the face with his fist. Seeing her lying on the floor, Maurice, then five, grabbed his dad’s leg thinking to thwart the attack on his mom. Savagely, he threw his son against the wall. Seeing this, Darcella rushed to the kitchen and returned with a steak knife. When he raised his arms to prevent the knife from entering his chest, she began stabbing his arms. The struggle ended when he collapsed in the hallway, covered with blood. When the police arrived and asked who the attacker was, he answered, “Some guys,” inexplicably saving Darcella from battery charges and certain incarceration.

This scene was forever branded in the five-year old son’s mind.

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After lunch, Laura took a brief stroll in the park with Maurice. She soon found he had absolutely no dreams concerning the future. He believed his future would be a disastrous continuation of the present.

Leaving the park, Laura treated the boy to a Häagen-Dazs chocolate ice cream cone and some time on a video game. Upon departing, she gave the boy her business card with instructions to call her if he should ever be hungry. He thanked her for the lunch, the ice cream cone, the great day, and walked away.

Maurice didn't call. Not having a quarter to call her on a pay phone, he simply tossed the card. Laura wondered if she would ever see her young friend again.

On Thursday of the same week, upon walking home from work at 7:30 pm, she approached the exact place where she had found Maurice earlier in the week. He was there, his clothes continued tattered and personal hygiene obviously continued at the bottom of the totem pole of priorities. He smiled when he saw Laura. After greetings, she asked, "Are you hungry, Maurice?"

"I'm starved."

The order was the same for both: Big Mac, fries, thick chocolate shake...

This time Maurice began opening up about his "family." He gave some details, but as Laura would later find out, omitted the most appalling aspects of his life. He lived in a welfare hotel with Darcella, his mother; with Rosa, his grandmother; and two sisters, Celeste and LaToya. When asked about his dad, he simply said, "He's not around." In response to where he was, added, "He's just gone." So far as roaming the streets, he said he could be gone day or night and his mom didn't care.

Maurice revealed he has received only two gifts in his entire life: a little Hess truck from his uncle Dark, on his fourth birthday. On his sixth birthday he received from his grandmother a joint to smoke. Rosa, his grandmother, was famous because of a straight razor she called "Betsy", that she carried everywhere she went. And used as necessary.

Once when Maurice's mom was incarcerated, agents from the Bureau of Child Welfare knocked on his apartment door to take him into custody. The boy managed to flee, with the agents in hot pursuit. He managed to elude them long enough to reach his grandma Rosa's dwelling. He burst through the door with the men on his heels. They informed grandma Rosa they were taking Maurice with them. She approached the agents with Betsy in her hand and declared, "My grandson ain't going nowhere." Seeing the gleam in grandma's eye, the men left faster than they came—without Maurice.

His uncles were all drug pushers, in prison or out of prison, or just plain crazy. At times they would get Maurice to transport their drugs. These relatives would drift into and out of his life, or shall we say, the room of the welfare hotel where he lived. Interestingly, the only people Maurice really trusted were these social misfits who had absolutely no solid values to offer to him.

It was agreed that the following Monday evening they would have lunch at the Hard Rock Café. He showed up shortly after 7:00 pm in his same clothes—with one difference. They were clean. Told he could order anything he pleased, he asked, "Can I have a steak with mashed potatoes?" When his sizzling sirloin arrived, a new problem presented itself. Maurice had no idea how to use a knife and fork. First he

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grasped the knife like a dagger. Rather than embarrass him, Laura let him find his own solution to eating the meat, which turned out to be simple. He grabbed the meat with both hands and bit off chewable portions.

After more meals in restaurants, Laura surprised Maurice by announcing she would fix the next meal in her apartment. While the meal was cooking, she told her young guest that there was something important they needed to discuss. Maurice immediately became tense. Laura went on to explain that she wanted him to be her friend, that they needed to trust each other and that as long as he was trustworthy they would be friends.

This was a new concept for Maurice. Asked if it made sense, he answered with another question: “Is that it? You just want to be my friend?” Assured that it was, Maurice held out his hand to shake, saying, “A deal’s a deal.”

It was only later that he revealed his initial hesitance. In his environment nothing was free. To grant a favor meant to give a favor. And that was always risky. He believed that sooner or later he would find out what this white lady would ask in exchange for friendship.

Laura was careful to never make Maurice feel that his lack of basic skills or sophistication would be a hindrance to their nascent friendship. The wisdom of this approach became evident the first time she invited him to have dinner with her. Showing Maurice where the tableware was, she asked him to set the table. Several minutes later he came to the kitchen and requested, “Miss Laura, can you teach me how to set the table?”

For those of us raised in functional homes, asking favors or help is about as natural as breathing. In fact, we sometimes hyperventilate when requesting favors or assistance. For Maurice, however, this was a major milestone in his social metamorphosis. He now trusted Laura enough to ask a favor without fearing he would be required to reciprocate with something he would be unprepared to give.

Once they started eating, Maurice wanted to know how to use a knife and fork. Instead of explaining, Laura began eating very slowly, permitting the boy to observe exactly how it was done. He proved to be a quick learner.

Maurice only ate half his meal. Asked if he wasn’t hungry, he sheepishly replied that he wanted to take some food to his mother. “Is that okay?”

Laura told him there was more food in the kitchen and that she would send a plate for his mother. The food on his own plate was quickly devoured.

Next Laura had the boy help her roll out and cut cookie dough. After they emerged from the oven hot and fragrant, Maurice discovered the joy of dessert.

By the time the day was over, Maurice chalked up a number of firsts in his life: 1) He learned how to set a table, 2) he learned how to eat at a table, 3) he learned how to eat with cutlery, 4) he learned to enjoy dessert, and 5) he learned to trust.

We are all born equal. For some that equality lasts about as long as it takes for the newborn to gasp for the first gulp of air. If ever the words of David, of being conceived in iniquity are literally true, it is in the case of children who enter the world, not as bundles of love, but as intruders. In most cases there is no father to welcome them. The mother’s latent maternal instinct to love and care for the new life she has brought forth

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contributes to growth approximately as much as the milk which her undernourished, diseased body is able to produce.

Those of us who were loved while yet in the womb and cuddled by loving arms at birth are unable to understand what it means to enter life unloved and unwanted. We can't imagine what it is like to grow up not trusting anyone—no one—not even our own mother.

Yet, he loved his mother. Strangely, when he probably felt the closest to her was when she was injecting drugs into her own vein. She would be fidgety, angry, irritable, unreasonable... Then as the drugs entered her circulatory system, she would undergo a transformation and become happy; she would smile at her son. Could there be anything nicer than that?

Indirectly, everything in Maurice's life, for as long as he could remember, revolved around drugs. At a younger age he didn't understand the constant coming and going of men into his mother's bedroom. He watched as his 16-year old uncle "Juice" would at times stand behind the door and hit the "visitors" on the head with a ten-pound dumbbell, rob them, and then drag the unconscious victims out to the hall where they would eventually stumble out with an aching head and empty wallet.

Police would frequently pound on the door, arrest Maurice's mother and take her away in handcuffs—only to return some hours later. It wasn't until much later that he learned that she was actually an informant. It was through these little fictitious arrests that she would be taken to headquarters where she would download information gathered on street criminals. Her payment for snitching was a supply of heroin, taken from drugs confiscated on the street by the police.

By the time he met Laura, Maurice had moved more times than the average citizen would move in two or three lifetimes. Even the best—or shall we say, the least worst—of the welfare hotels were unmitigated dumps, unsanitary, unsafe, in which crime, drugs and prostitution were a constant.

Monday evening encounters soon settled into a routine—a delightful routine for both Laura and Maurice. As the boy's trust grew, so did his desire to learn more about the new life to which he was being exposed. The experience for Laura was something akin to becoming acquainted with an extraterrestrial being. She offered to purchase food he could use to pack school lunches. His first question was if he could put the lunches in a brown paper bag. Mystified, Laura asked for an explanation. "Because," he explained, "when I see kids come to school with their lunch in a paper bag, that means someone cares about them..." And Laura cared.

After about two months, Maurice asked if Laura would come to the parent-teacher meeting. He explained that after meeting her the frequency of his schoolyard fights had decreased and he would like for his teachers to see the reason why. Laura discovered that Miss Hall, Maurice's teacher, was a caring, dedicated professional who was doing her best to help her difficult student. She mentioned how his behavior had improved after learning to know Laura. Looking her straight in the eyes, Miss Hall said, "You cannot just wake up one day and abandon this boy." Never would she do that.

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Miss Hall recognized Maurice's superior intelligence and potential to become a useful citizen. She said one serious problem she had with her student was that he never came to class on time. Later, when discussing his tardiness, Maurice looked away with tears in his eyes. Laura caught on that he was disappointed in himself for having let his protector down. He explained there was no clock in his room and he never knew what time it was. The problem was quickly solved with an alarm clock and a watch.

She was also astonished at what he didn't know and didn't realize he didn't know. After sniffing around for some time one evening, she suggested the boy blow his nose. Imagine her surprise when she found he had no idea how to blow his own nose! She had to show him how.

The months went by. The day that Laura told him that she had been a problem student and never gone on to college, his attitude was given another boost. If the person he loved most on earth had been a problem child and succeeded, so could he.

Another giant stepping stone was learning to know Laura's sister Annette's family. Here he saw a functioning middle class family. Annette's children instantly and unreservedly bonded with Maurice. They accepted him as a brother. After their first meal together, he later remarked to Laura he had no idea that a family would eat around a table and then sit around chatting. It slowly dawned on him that this was the kind of life he wanted.

Maurice was mystified by the large jar in which Laura kept all her change. He wandered why she didn't spend the coins instead of saving them. When she explained that she was saving the money for some eventuality when she would need some extra money, he learned another concept he had never heard about: saving money. To him money was meant to be spent — Now! — not saved.

One day when Maurice came to see Laura he was in tears, something extremely rare for a tough street-kid. He explained that his mom had been picked up for selling drugs and was in jail—this time for real. He opened up, telling her how much he hated that her life revolved around drugs. Laura listened, without passing judgment on his mom. Later on he told her that it was the first time in his life he opened up with someone he felt could understand and help him with his problem. Trust.

And then a truly astonishing breakthrough. After treating him to a lavish birthday celebration, when she dropped him off at his apartment that evening, he thanked her for everything and kissed her on the cheek. He turned toward his door, then stopped, turned, and spoke words that probably had never passed his lips before. "I love you!" Maurice was learning to love.

Maurice loved spending time with Laura's sister's family. Once one of the children was having a bad moment and wouldn't stop crying, making them late for an appointment. Bruce, the child's dad, sat down with the child, enfolded her in his arms, stroked her hair, and repeated that everything would be okay. Maurice was amazed. In his world the child would have been kicked across the room. The lesson: It was possible to be loved, even when apparently undeserving.

Laura began dating and as things became serious, she believed he would propose and once married they would invite Maurice to live with them. Her disappointment

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was intense when she was unequivocally informed that the boy would not be part of their new family. Tears, angry words and sulking did nothing to change his mind. About this same time Maurice's mom began serving a 30 month plea bargained prison sentence (reduced from 25 years) for attempted murder. The more spacious apartment she was about to occupy didn't materialize and Maurice was forced to live with his grandmother and 12 other persons, which included cousins, uncles, friends, drug dealers, in a tiny room. It would hardly be metaphoric to say this was a sardine existence. Maurice took to the streets, sleeping where he could. Streetwise, this in reality was no great trial to the youth. It was a life he slipped into with relative ease.

To come up with "operating cash" Maurice panhandled. He soon came to the conclusion this was beneath his dignity and needed to find another source of income. He was totally familiar with the drug trade and could have been into big money overnight. After careful consideration he rejected this option and decided to find a job. He got a job as a messenger boy for eight dollars an hour.

Maurice's entrepreneurial instincts soon kicked in and he turned to a quasi-legitimate enterprise—purchasing jeans in Chinatown and selling them on the street as the real thing. He reasoned that between selling drugs or fake jeans, this was indisputably the lesser of two evils.

We now fast-forward. Maurice has a wife and children.

After taking a GED test and passing, He also took the test to join the New York Police Department, but to actually become a cop he needed at least two years of college. It was while in college that he became aware there were more black men in prison than in college. He organized a program to encourage black youth to get an education. So impressive was his work that he was awarded a Certificate of Achievement for his outstanding work.

Sometime later, when Laura turned 50, her husband staged a lavish birthday party for her. After the customary toasts and speeches, the last one to arise was a black man impeccably dressed. Before striding to the podium, he bent down and kissed the lady beside him, dressed in a navy blue gown.

He began, "Laurie, where can I start...?" He then told the story of a hungry boy panhandling for change on a busy New York street. He told of a woman who passed by, began crossing the street and then looked back, almost getting hit by a car. The woman took him to McDonalds. He said, "You know, at that moment she saved my life. 'Cause I was going down the wrong road, the wrong hill... and the Lord sent me an angel. And my angel was Laurie." Raising his glass and looking at Laurie, he declared, "Without you, I could not be the man I am today."

Read the book.

Without a doubt this is an interesting story. What can we learn?

An act of kindness can change a life. We all know this, but often are too busy to take the time to be kind.

But that isn't the reason for telling Maurice's story.

We don't know what hunger is.

We don't what it is to sleep on the street.



We don't know what it means to not trust anyone, not even our own parents.  
We have never seen a brutal fight or someone killed.  
We have never panhandled.  
We can't imagine what it would be like to never have done an honest day's work.  
We don't know what it is like to subsist on criminal activities.  
We have no idea how many souls are living in Maurice's world.  
Yet...  
We complain,  
We blame,  
We become depressed.  
We live at odds with others.  
We say we have an inferiority complex.  
We become discouraged with life.  
We see ourselves surrounded by enemies, by enemies which we ourselves have created or permitted to become part of our life.  
All the while living in misery and ignoring the prepared table. ▲

## Taps

### **Emma Burns**

In BN186 I had an article entitled Give Them Their Roses, in which I told about Emma Burns, my mother-in-law. She was 90 at the time. Now, at 91 she has passed on.

Emma was a pioneer, a Pioneer, with a capital P. She was a born pioneer, it was in her DNA. Following are some excerpts from Give Them Their Roses...

In many ways, the move to Brazil took her further back in time than her childhood. No road led to where camp was set up near the falls on the Monte Alegre River, on a fisherman's trail. There was no electricity, no telephone service. Not even a house. And if there isn't a house, neither is there an outhouse. And much less a bathroom. Of course, there were no laundry facilities.

In a nutshell, to move to a new continent where the people speak a different language, have different customs, eat different food, do things different, requires a real adjustment. This is especially true for the womenfolks.

Now, just a few observations on priorities when moving to a new place.

- The first and most urgent is a bathroom, or at least an outhouse. To say that there were no bathroom facilities of any kind on the settlement is hardly truthful. Actually, since the tent was pitched in a little clearing surrounded by woods, there were dozens of relief facilities. You see, when nature begins to shout, a large bush or a small clump of trees can do miracles. And they did for a number of weeks.

- Next comes water. (Think about it, you parents who travel with small children. The two phrases you hear most frequently from the back seat of the car are: "I gotta go" and "I'm thirsty.") All it took to have some of the best water in the whole world

was a bucket. About a hundred yards from the tent there was a stream with a flow of—and now I'm guessing—a thousand gallons a minute of the purest water you'll find anywhere. We would go down to the stream for our drinking water, cooking water, washing-up water, bath water, and water for washing clothes (more on this a little later). It would take quite a few trips down to the stream each day, but water was no problem.

- People have to eat. There was no stove, so a number of termite mounds were knocked down and then used to make a crude encirclement in which a fire was built. One of my first memories of Emma in Brazil, which continues to be a lasting one, is of her hovering over her little stove cooking for the family.

Remember, there were no fridges, no freezers, no N American grocery stores, so what did Emma cook over that open fire? Oh! yes, and when it rained, I still see her stooped over that fire stirring a pot of something with one hand while holding an umbrella with the other. They talk about kitchen ranges. Well, this was kitchen on the range.

So what was cooked on this range? Corn bread and cake were baked in a large cast iron skillet over the fire. There were plenty of rice and beans. While man can live on rice and beans alone, it is nice to have some meat. Our meat came from fishing and hunting. We ate a lot of venison, quail, armadillos, an occasional porcupine,

- Washing clothes. When for all practical purposes living out in the open, clothes get dirty fast. Really fast. The solution? The solution was large basins, maybe three or four feet across on top. The right amount of dirty clothes would be placed in the basin, water hauled up from the stream added, and soap... Then the one doing the washing would remove her shoes or sandals, step in and begin stomping. Once this first cycle was finished, the clothes were taken out, wrung—by hand, of course—and taken down to the stream, where they were rinsed in the fast-flowing water, wrung again, and taken back up to the tent and spread out on the bushes (ah... not those other bushes) to dry. When ironing was necessary, sad irons (the kind you heat on the stove top or in the fire) were used on a makeshift ironing board made of folded sheets on a table.

Before you consider for your own use the energy efficient stomping machine used back then for washing clothes, I think it only fair to mention that they don't operate exclusively on rice and beans—or whatever. My sister-in-law, who spent hours and hours and hours “washing” clothes, only operated at full efficiency with a book held eye-level.

The stomping machine became the standard means of washing clothes by all the housewives on the settlement during the first months.

And one other thing. No pedicure can turn out cleaner feet than a stomping machine.

- A roof. In a tropical country, a small tent can hardly be called a roof for a family of six. Denton, a carpenter by trade, purchased some 2x2's and masonite in town and built the first shelter on the settlement. It must have been approximately 8 feet by 10 feet. The roof, as well as the walls, was made of masonite. The floor was dirt. There were no windows, only a door-sized opening to let people enter and exit. It was affectionately called The Cracker Box.

This could hardly be called a luxury unit, but it was certainly an improvement over the tent.

One Sunday the preacher and his wife, John & Alma Penner, came over for a visit in the Cracker House. And again it poured rain like you wouldn't believe. The roof began to leak so badly that the guests were given an umbrella to avoid getting soaked in the house.

Why do I tell you all this? In all that has been said, mom was the perfect pioneer, innovating, making do, helping other women get their bearings when moving to Brazil. Getting a new settlement going in a foreign country isn't an easy task. And so I'm glad I was able to give Mom her roses while she could see and smell them. Again I say, "Thank you. You were a great pioneer. ▲

## Life in Brazil

### Roads

We live 400 kilometers (250 miles) from Brasília—180 km from Brasília to Goiânia and 120 km from Goiânia to Rio Verde, our home town, and then another 30 km to the Colony, for a total of 430 km.

The first stretch, from Brasília to Goiânia was a narrow two-lane highway with steep grades and sharp curves. Busses loaded with passengers would take these blind curves with a hundred foot drop-off at breakneck speeds. Apparently there were more survivors than victims, as no one ever stopped them.

Except for the first 10 km. out of Goiânia, the road was dirt. I once described it as:

It wasn't until several kilometers

Out of Goiânia

That the hard reality of Brazil

Began to settle on us

As we began to bump,

And sway,

And dodge,

And hit the Kombi roof,

And slowly change

From a pale States white

To a dull red.

And as the hours wore on

And we began to wonder

If maybe this road had no end  
Went to the Land of Nowhere...

The last 30 km (then, some 35 km before the new road was built) could easily take two hours or more with a dozen gates to open. Again I quote:

Soon the lights of Rio Verde were left behind  
As we started out for the fazenda,  
“Around 20 miles”  
We were told,  
“Oh! maybe two hours if everything goes well.”  
“This river,” they said, “is the Rio Verdinho,”  
As we crossed a rickty bridge.  
“The bridge over the Pirapitinga Stream.”  
They said.  
But nothing had prepared us  
For two bare beams  
And someone ahead of the Kombi  
Kneeling, carefully lighting the way,  
And motioning,  
So that we would not err  
Neither to the left nor the right.  
Then as the road got narrower,  
And narrower  
And began what they said  
Was a fisherman’s trail  
And the forest more imposing  
They said we were getting near home.  
Home?...

For a number of years there has been a pleasant four-lane highway from Brasília to Goiânia with modern stations and restaurants.

The road from Goiânia to Rio Verde, our home town, was paved some 35 years ago.

Now it is being turned into a four-lane highway all the way from Goiânia to Cuiabá, the capital of the state of Mato Grosso. Within a year this road should be done.

The road from Rio Verde to Montividiu, which takes us up next to the Colony was paved some 30 years ago and today is unbelievably busy. My wife often counts the amount of vehicles we meet from Rio Verde to the Colony entrance, some 30 km. It usually ranges between 95–150, one third often being trucks. It is reported that within a year work will begin to turn this into a four-lane highway.

The highway from Rio Verde to Itumbiara and then on to São Paulo and southern Brazil is now four-lane.

Talk about roads in our area and we smile. ▲

## The Economy

For years the black plague of Brazilian economy was inflation. An inverse version of the Robin Hood principle of robbing the rich and helping the poor, inflation robs the poor and middle classes and benefits the very rich.

From a short period when inflation hit 2% per day—d-a-y—(which is compounded daily), to the present in which our inflation is hanging in at 6% per annum, giant economic strides have been made.

Slaying the dragon of inflation changed the course of the nation, and most fortunately, for the poor. Brazil's middle class is blossoming. Those who rode bicycles have graduated to cycles to used cars, and increasingly, to newer vehicles. Many own their own homes, purchased with low interest long-term government loans. Possibly there is no better measure of the economic welfare of a people than a full belly. Rio Verde is loaded with supermarkets of all sizes. Many of the larger ones have 15 or more checkouts.

On one block of Presidente Vargas, the main avenue going through the middle of town, there are five enormous stores selling furniture and appliances. They sell truckloads of their merchandise each day.

Jobs are plentiful. While wages are still low by N American standards, they are still sufficient for the dedicated worker to climb the socioeconomic ladder. ▲

## The Price of Land

When the first land was purchased in 1968 the price was \$2.50 per acre—that is two US dollars and fifty cents per acre. We could have purchased a hundred thousand acres of land, or more, for that price.

The initial purchase of 9,259 acres cost us \$20,000 USD. Subsequent purchases were a bit higher, but still for a little of nothing.

# Brazil <sup>14</sup> News

Land sold recently went for over \$7,400 USD per acre. The owner of a tract of land on the Colony is reportedly asking well over \$9,000 per acre—and with a bit of patience will probably get it.

These prices, translated into everyday English, mean that in USD there are a bunch of multi-millionaires living on the Colony.

In practical terms, this means the end of opportunity for new farmers in our area. A calculation was made that at \$9,000 USD per acre, it would take over 30 years to pay for land purchased at this price, if ALL the profit were taken to pay off the land, keeping nothing back for living expenses.

Is there still opportunity in Brazil, land that can be bought at a more reasonable price? Yes, but nothing like the original price.

We have two more settlements in which the price is considerably cheaper, but little interest is shown in moving to these areas.

Why?

Among other reasons, one is human inertia, that is, a reluctance to step out of the comfort zone. While our living standard over here still lags way behind yours in N America, we are enjoying the modernity that has come to our area. Within a year we should have a large shopping center in Rio Verde. We feel at home here.

It seems that the pioneer spirit, the kind that Emma Burns had, is going the way of the Mohicans. ▲

## Where Are We?

Just a bit of a rundown of where we live, by the number of members in the congregation and missions here in Brazil:

Monte Alegre . . . . .	132
Rio Verdinho . . . . .	70
Rio Verde . . . . .	52
Boa Esperança . . . . .	43
Tocantins. . . . .	14
Missions . . . . .	30
TOTAL. . . . .	341

## Exports

Brazil exports soybeans, beef, chickens, coffee, ethanol, vehicles, plus all kinds of other stuff. It makes for a good trade surplus.

But that isn't all Brazil exports.

A hot export item is Holdeman brides...

(Oops! Ran out of space. More on this in the next issue.)

Readers Contribute

## **This Is The Truth**

*If you turn things upside down you can't hope for your life to change.  
I would be lying to you if I said that you have a great future ahead,  
That you can recover from your mistakes,  
That your life can be filled with joy,  
That you can have a deep sense of purpose.  
More than anything else you must know human beings cannot accomplish these things.  
And I am convinced of this because I know you.  
All you are capable of is failure.  
You have made a complete mess of your life and I refuse to believe under any circumstance that  
You can turn things around in the coming years.  
You may think your life is hard now, but here is much more to come  
You have only one destiny.  
And whether you like it or not this is what is real.  
I am the Lord your God.*

(Strange, isn't it? Discouraging, to say the least.

Now read this backwards, starting from the last line and going up. That sounds better, doesn't it?)