Brazil News

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Editorial

Mennoville

Mennoville is so small it hardly qualifies as a blip on the map. According to the Census Bureau the population is made up of one hundred families and their children. The service station, the grocery store, the mechanic shop, and several other businesses are run by the Mennoville men. The rest of the men are farmers or have jobs in neighboring towns.

The inhabitants of Mennoville are very ordinary people, good people—generally speaking.

One day, about noon, one of the children was riding his bike when he saw something really strange. He ran into the house and shouted:

"Hey, Mom, Dad! Come take a look outside. There are some words up in the sky."

"What do you mean? Words in the sky…?"

"That's right! Come look."

Dad and Mom were about to attribute the boy's assertion to his active imagination when they heard shouting outside.

"Look! Look! What does it say?"

Dad, Mom and son left the house on a run. The shouting was attracting other neighbors and soon everyone was out looking at the sky. The words, etched in silver against a dark cloud were unmistakably visible.

TO REACH HEAVEN

YOU MUST OBEY THE WORD

AND

HAVE A NET WORTH

OF AT LEAST FIVE MILLION DOLLARS.

YOU HAVE TEN YEARS TO SET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER.

That's all it said.

There was bedlam on the street. Everyone spoke at once.

A few—three to be exact—had big, contented smiles on their faces.

They were worth five million plus.

Others—ten—looked worried, but not downcast.

These were quite wealthy, worth maybe three or four million. In ten years, they felt quite certain, it would be possible to come up with what it would take to pass through the pearly gates.

But for the rest of the population there was wailing and gnashing of financial teeth. The twelve retirees who owned their own home, a car, and had a few small investments knew their doom had been sealed. The majority of the others who made their living as working men knew there was no possible way they would reach the five mil mark in ten years. They were object lessons in despair.

Ten years go by fast. The three who already held celestial certificates worked harder than ever. One actually doubled his net worth and the other two came close. These were the most blessed ten years of their lives.

It appeared that the other ten would reach their goal of five mil, when the global economy hit bottom with a vengeance and only four ended up certified. The other six lost most of their wealth.

The morning of the tenth year dawned bright and clear—except for a dark cloud in the sky. It looked just like the cloud that had hovered over the village ten years earlier. Possibly because of this, a number of villagers were looking skyward when suddenly a writing appeared.

TO REACH HEAVEN
YOU MUST OBEY THE WORD
AND
HAVE A NET WORTH
OF NO MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS.
YOU HAVE ONE MONTH TO SET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER.
(Please disregard the message received ten years ago.)

There were exactly 93 citizens out on the streets of Mennoville conducting themselves a bit like the population when David returned from a successful military campaign. The certified seven were not only bewildered by this sudden change of fortunes, they were in agony (more so than those who 10 years previously thought their doom had been sealed by the silver writing in the cloud).

With upraised fists, distorted faces and screaming at the dark cloud, they vociferated:

"How could you? We have worked hard to get our certificate—harder by far than those who took life easy. Unfair! Unfair!"

Even as the 93 discussed in low tones if they should call 911 for the deranged, one of the seven raised both fists skyward and demanded, "Now what? What are we supposed to do with goods we have acquired with our hard, honest work? Are

we supposed to take a vow of poverty and live like the shiftless in our village?"

Even celestial messages can have fine print, for suddenly their appeared at the bottom of the cloud the following words:

Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor,

and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.

All seven went away sorrowful, for they had great possessions.

A week later the cloud appeared in the sky again. A shout went up and within seconds the entire village was in the street looking upward. Behold the message:

THE LOVE OF MONEY
IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.
TO REACH HEAVEN
YOU MUST OBEY THE WORD

AND
NOT SET YOUR AFFECTIONS ON YOUR POSSESSIONS,
BE THEY GREAT OR SMALL.
SET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER FOR TOMORROW YOU MAY DIE.
(This is the final alert.
Please disregard all previous messages.)

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life,
and few there be that find it.

Again the fine print.

And this is when things began to get touchy.

With the shackles of rigid monetary or possessional limitations removed, the proverbial "talk of the town" was reduced to one subject. Possessions. It soon became evident there were two kinds of villagers…

Those who very conscientiously weighed their possessions to make sure they had no excess baggage.

And those who checked with the airlines to find out how much was charged for excess baggage.

An old villager walking down the street, deep in thought, was heard muttering to himself, "This place reminds me of the parable of the wise and the foolish villagers." ▲

Misunderstandings

KLM FLIGHT 4805/PAN AM FLIGHT 1736 — Due to a bomb threat, on March 27, 1977 all incoming passenger planes to the Canary Islands were diverted to Los Rodeos, a small regional airport on the island of Tenerife, some 25 minutes away. Pan Am Flight 1736, a Boeing 747 jumbo jet with 366 passenger aboard, and KLM Flight 4805, also a 747 Jumbo, from Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport with 235 passengers, were among the diverted planes. Within minutes the Tenerife airport was a chaotic scene of utter congestion.

KLM pilot, Jacob Veldhuyzen van Zanten, a veteran of 1,545 hours of flying time on 747s was a top-notch pilot responsible for training all of KLM's 747 pilots. Foreseeing a long wait to refuel at the airport at the Canary Islands, the pilot decided to refuel, taking on an additional 142,000 pounds of jet fuel at Tenerife. The refueling delayed KLM Flight 4805 sufficiently to place it just ahead of Pan Am Flight 1703 for takeoff.

The area was engulfed in a thick fog, and to make matters worse, the Los Rodeos airport had no ground radar. Air controllers had to visually direct traffic.

KLM Flight 4805 was instructed to taxi down the main runway, do a 180º turn upon reaching the head and await instructions for takeoff. Pan Am Flight 1703 was also taxing on the main runway, some distance behind the KLM, with instructions to take the third exit and proceed to the head of the main runway on a parallel tarmac, thus placing it behind the KLM for takeoff.

Due to the heavy fog the two planes lost visual contact. The Pan Am pilots became confused as to which exit to take. Air traffic control repeated the instructions: "The third one, sir, one, two, three, third, third one." Even so, the Pan Am crew was confused as to which was the third exit and deciding that the tower had miscounted, proceeded to the fourth exit, thus remaining on the main runway longer than expected.

By now KLM 4805 had executed the 180º turn and requested clearance for takeoff. The following exchange took place between KLM and the tower:

KLM 4805 – "The KLM four eight zero five is now ready for takeoff and we are waiting our ATC (air traffic control) clearance."

Tower – "KLM four eight seven zero five you are cleared to the Papa Beacon, climb to and maintain flight level nine zero, right turn after takeoff, proceed with heading four zero until intercepting the three two five radial from Las Palmas."

KLM 4805 – "Ah, roger sir, we are cleared to the Papa Beacon, flight level nine zero until intercepting the three two five. We are now at take off."

Tower – OK. Stand by for take off. I will call you.

Unfortunately, KLM heard only the words "OK." The rest, "Stand by for take off. I will call you," was blocked by a simultaneous radio call from Pan Am informing the tower they were still taxing on the main runway. The tower requested they be informed as soon as the main runway was clear.

Believing he was cleared for takeoff, Captain van Zanten advanced the throttles on his 747 and in moments was hurtling down the runway. The KLM flight engineer heard the exchange between Pan Am 1736 and the tower. He spoke to the pilot.

KLM Flight engineer – "Is hij er niet af dan? (Is he not clear then)?

KLM Captain – Wat seg je? (What do you say?)"

KLM Flight engineer – Is hij er niet af, die Pan American? (Is he not clear that Pan American?)"

KLM Captain (speaking emphatically) – Jawel!"

At 700 meters distance, the two crews saw each other. Due to the fog, the Pan Am pilot had but precious seconds trying to decide if the other aircraft was stationary or moving toward him. Seeing the danger he was in, he immediately steered off the runway. The KLM pilot, now hurtling down the runway at 180 miles an hour, pulled

back on the yoke attempting a premature takeoff. The extra 142,000 rendered his aircraft sluggish. Even so, he managed to get his plane airborne, but not soon enough. The main landing gear and rear fuselage struck the Pan Am plane. The KLM aircraft remained airborne for 150 meters and slammed into the earth, skidding for another 300, engulfed in flames. So intense were the flames that 5,000 kilograms of foam and half a million liters of water were needed to extinguish the flames — 10 hours later.

The report elaborated by KLM and Pan Am issued a joint report, placing the blame on van Zanten…

1. He took off without clearance.
2. He did not obey the "stand by for take off" order from the tower.
3. He did not interrupt take off on learning that the Pan Am was still on the runway.
4. In reply to the flight engineer's query as to whether the Pan Am had already left the runway, he replied emphatically in the affirmative. The root of the crash, it was determined, was bad communications.

RESULT: All 235 KLM passengers were incinerated in seconds. Only 56 passengers and five crew members survived Pan Am Flight 1736. Until today, this crash holds the record of the most fatalities of any aircraft disaster in history.

THE MONT BLANC AND THE IMO. World War I had been in progress for three years and German U-boats were roving the seas with the intention of disrupting Allied shipping.

The harbor at Halifax, Nova Scotia has one of the world's largest natural harbors. It is Canada's only major ice-free harbor that is reached through a strait that at one point constricts to a mere 600 yards, appropriately called The Narrows.

Traffic through the strait was controlled by rigid rules with ships passing each other on the right, just as vehicular traffic in N America and many other countries of the world. If for some reason a ship wanted to pass on the left, it was required to give a single short blast of its horn. If the approaching ship agreed, it responded with a similar horn blast and then crossed to the other side. However, if the approaching ship did not agree, it had to give two short blasts. Thus, the first ship either was to move over or give another single short blast indicating it would not pass on the left. If the two ships were unable to agree, both were required to come to a complete halt until an agreement could be reached. This sounds a bit primitive, but 1917 was nearly a hundred years ago when radio communication was still prenatal.

The channel was shut down to traffic at night by an anti-submarine net stretched over the opening of the strait.

On December 5th, 1917 the French munitions ship, Mont Blanc, left New York with a cargo of approximately 25,000 tons of explosives which included picric acid, TNT and guncotton. It reached Halifax on the evening of the 6th, when the anti-submarine nets had already closed down the strait and therefore dropped anchor for the night without entering. The captain and crew were fully aware that they were sitting ducks should an enemy sub approach.

The anti-submarine net also kept ships in the harbor from exiting at night. One of

these ships was the Imo, a Norwegian-registered ship scheduled for a humanitarian cruise to German-occupied Belgium with relief supplies. Berlin had agreed to let the ship, clearly identified with the words "Belgium Relief" pass through the Nazi blockade and deliver food and supplies to the citizens of Belgium.

At approximately 7:30 the following morning the anti-submarine net was removed from the entrance of the channel. The Imo immediately left harbor, sailing to sea. The first ship to enter the channel from sea was a tramp steamer, identified by some historians as the SS Clara.

Contrary to the rules of the sea, the SS Clara approached the Imo on the wrong wide of the channel. The Imo had no objections, switched to the left side and they passed without incident. This amicable switch to unconventionality set the stage for the terrible disaster which was soon to occur.

The Imo was now headed to sea, approaching the Narrows at almost twice the accepted channel speed, "on the wrong side of the road." The Mont Blanc was also approaching the Narrows, headed to harbor at a speed of four knots—on a collision course with the Imo.

The Imo sounded one blast of the horn warning the Mont Blanc to take the other side of the channel. The Mont Blanc responded with two blasts of its horn, signaling his unwillingness to make an abrupt evasive move with his dangerous cargo.

What followed was a sequence of horn blasts from both ships. The locals knew that this exchange presaged a disaster and hundreds flocked to the harbor to witness what was about to happen

When the ships were but a few hundred yards apart, both captains took evasive action. The captain of the Mont Blanc ordered hard rudder to the left and the captain of the Imo ordered full reverse of its engines. Too late. At approximately 8:45 a.m. the Imo, traveling at seven knots, cut a nine foot gash into the right hull of the Mont Blanc. With its engines in full reverse, the Imo immediately backed off, but the attrition of metal on metal created sparks that ignited the cargo of picric acid on the Mont Blanc.

The water pumps were damaged in the crash and it was impossible to get sufficient pressure to douse the flames. The captain ordered the crew to abandon ship, making known his decision to remain aboard. He was convinced of the futility of remaining aboard and climbed into a lifeboat.

The crew of the Imo was perplexed by the decision to abandon ship as the damage to the Mont Blanc was above the water line. Because of being at war, the red flag was not flown indicating an explosive cargo. The crew rowed to the harbor with desperate strokes of the oars, wildly gesturing and shouting of the impending disaster. However, because of a language barrier their warnings were not understood. All the while the Mont Blanc was drifting to the harbor, coming to rest on Pier 6, setting it afire. The Halifax fire department responded with 13 units and a tugboat that sprayed the burning ship with water, but by now the Mont Blanc was a conflagration of flames and smoke.

At 9:04 a.m. an explosion equivalent of approximately three kilotons of TNT took place , the most violent man-made explosion recorded until that date. Buildings within a half mile of the explosion were leveled. A mile away buildings were uninhabitable.

There was damage reported as far as ten miles away. Residents of Glasgow, 78 miles away felt the shock and reported objects falling from shelves. Unbelievably, people 225 miles away said they heard or felt the blast. Approximately 1,600 locals were killed and hundreds more injured, many rendered blind by flying glass. The Mont Blanc anchor was found two miles from the explosion and a cannon three miles away. The blast exposed the sea bed for seconds and created a tsunami 60 feet high. The captain and most of the crew of the Imo were killed. The aboriginal village of Mi'Kmaq, a hundred miles away vanished. Direct and indirect deaths reached nearly 2,000, with some 9,000 injured.

The resulting inquiry blamed harbor officials and officers on both ships, but the bottom line was poor communication. For large oceangoing ships to communicate with single and double horn blasts was a time bomb—literally.

AIR FRANCE FLIGHT 447. On June 1, 2009, at approximately 2 a.m., Air France flight 447 was halfway across the Atlantic in its flight from Rio de Janeiro to Paris. The Airbus 330 with a crew of 12 and 216 passengers was cruising at 35,000 feet, flying into a massive storm. The sleeping passengers were unaware of what was taking place.

The cockpit crew consisted of Marc Dubois, the pilot, and two co-pilots, David Robert and Pierre-Cedric Bonin. At 2:02 co-pilot David Robert re-entered the cockpit after taking a nap. In spite of the storm they were entering, Capt Marc Dubois decided to head to the crew's quarters and take a nap, asking co-pilot Pierre-Cedric Bonin to occupy his seat and assume control of the plane, even though he had much less experience than co-pilot David Robert, who occupied the right seat.

Seeing that the radar wasn't working properly, he calibrated the instrument and at 2:08 a.m. suggested to Bonin to steer away from the heart of the storm. Bonin agreed, but not before this new course took them straight into a towering thunderhead.

Two minutes later the Airbus shuddered and the terrible roar of the storm filled the cockpit. Moments later the pitot tubes that measure the aircraft's speed iced over. The airspeed indicator began oscillating between 139–274 knots. The Mach speed indicater gave yet another Reading, dropping from 0.80 (eight tenths of the speed of sound) to 0.26. Unable to compute these disparate readings, the autopilot disengaged. The craft was now in the hands of the pilots. Bonin, the less experienced co-pilot made sure his senior officer knew that he had the controls. "J'ai les commandes."

Ignoring the fact that the craft was still heavily loaded with fuel and would be unable to fly at a higher altitude, Bonin put the plane into a steep climb. Moments later the strident synthetic voice of the stall warning began to shout, "STALL! STALL!" Climbing at 7,000 feet per minute in the rarified atmosphere, the airspeed dropped to a mere 93 knots.

At 2:10:34 the ice on the left pitot tube thawed and the air speed indicator again gave an accurate reading of 223 knots. By now the two co-pilots were so befuddled that they were unable to analyze what was taking place.

Robert: "You're at…go back down."

Bonin: "It's going, we're going back down."

Robert: "Descend."

Bonin: "Here we go, we're descending."

Robert: "Softly."

Both co-pilots believed they had leveled off, when in reality they were still climbing, albeit at a slower rate, which increased air speed and caused the stall warning to quit sounding. When 38,000 feet were reached, the plane ceased to "fly" and began dropping. Word had been sent to the sleeping pilot that he was needed on the flight deck, but he didn't appear. Now dropping at 6,800 feet per second, both co-pilots began to swear. The engines were at full-thrust, but the downward plunge didn't abate.

The instruments plainly showed that the plane's nose was up at 30 degrees, a fact which the co-pilots somehow ignored. As any student pilot learns in some of his first lessons, the nose of the craft must be down to pull out of a stall.

At 2:11:42 the jet was at 36,000 feet with an air speed of 108 knots, dropping 9,100 feet per minute. The stall alarm was sounding when the pilot finally returned to the cockpit.

Dubois: "What the ____ are you doing?"

Bonin: "We've lost control of the plane!"

Robert: "We've totally lost control of the plane. We don't understand at all. We're tried everything."

By now the nose was up more than 40 degrees and the plunge toward the sea continued.

Robert: "What do you think about it? What do you think? What do we need to do? There. I don't know. There, it's going down."

Bonin: "That's good. We should be wings level. No, it won't…"

Dubois: "The wings to flat horizon, the standby horizon."

Robert: "The horizon. The speed?"

Stall warning: "You're climbing! YOU'RE GOING DOWN, DOWN, DOWN, DOWN."

Bonin: "Am I going down now?"

Robert: "Go down."

Dubois: "No, you climb here."

Bonin: "I'm climbing. OK, so we're going down."

It is now 2:12:44, the craft is at 20,000 feet and in a virtual free fall with its nose up.

Dubois: "It's impossible."

Bonin: "On altitude, what do we have?"

Robert: "What do you mean on altitude?"

Bonin: "Yeah, yeah, yeah I'm going down, no?"

Robert: "You're going down, yes."

Dubois: "Hey, you're in…get the wings horizontal. Get the wings horizontal."

Bonin: "That's what I'm trying to do."

Dubois: "Get the wings horizontal."

At 2:13:32 the plane was at just above 10,000 feet, meaning it had dropped 10,000 feet in a mere 48 seconds.

Robert: "Climb, climb, climb, climb!"

Bonin: "But I've been at maxi nose-up for a while."

Dubois: "No, no, no! Don't climb!"

Robert: "So go down. So give me the controls, the controls to me."

Bonin relinquished the controls to Robert, who finally managed to get the nose of the plane down. The ocean was now 4,000 feet below.

After a brief dialog between the pilots, the computer voice sounded: *"PULL UP! PULL UP! PULL UP!"*

Dubois: "Go on, pull!"

Bonin: "Let's go! Pull up! Pull up! Pull up!"

Robert: ____ it, we're going to crash! This can't be happening!"

Bonin: "But what's happening?"

Captain: "Ten degrees of pitch."

The plane slams into the ocean with no survivors.

There is no need to insert the official conclusions of the different boards of inquiry. Even the most untrained mind in aviation and aeronautics will quickly grasp what happened:

1) The pilot relinquished command to a relatively inexperienced co-pilot, apparently without checking weather charts.

2) The pilot was either sleeping so soundly, or distracted, as to not notice the turbulence and rapid descend of the aircraft.

3) Had the pilot immediately come to the flight deck when first called there would have been a better chance of survival.

4) The two co-pilots both misunderstood and ignored the instrument readings.

5) The conduct of both the co-pilots and the pilot was totally unprofessional, indeed amateurish.

6) The entire incident was a sequence of misunderstandings and confusion.

Anything about these tragedies sound familiar?

No, you're not a pilot nor a ship captain. But you are a human being interacting with other human beings, which means you know what it's like to have a situation suddenly and unexpectedly spiral out of control. It may have been with your boss, your employee, your congregation, your children or spouse, among many others.

The ignitor may have been extemporaneous, out of the blue, or it may have been spontaneous combustion, the unfortunate conjunction of latent, apparently insignificant attritions that finally reached the point of ignition.

It should be pointed out we are not speaking of long-standing, open hostilities in which opposing factors plot the humiliation or defeat of rivals. These are situations that life dishes out on a cracked plate—crises—primed to shatter and scatter.

And yet, everyone of them, like the tragedies we described, are avoidable. And that is what this writing is all about.

Misunderstandings maim and kill people; misunderstandings separate the closest of friends, misunderstandings annihilate matrimonial vows, misunderstandings are the Tower of Babel that destroy communications between siblings. Misunderstandings are the narcotics that send sound minds into a tailspin.

There is a solution. Clear communication.

SUBMARINES AND AIRCRAFT CARRIERS. Nuclear submarines cost up to eight billion dollars, with a crew of approximately 100; nuclear aircraft carriers cost nearly 15 billion, with a crew of approximately five thousand. With so much at stake, misunderstandings must be avoided. Interestingly, the captain, or the officer of the bridge in charge of the ship, never touches a single control (except on a sub, where the captain or XO manually manipulate the periscope—if you can call that a control). ALL orders are given verbally by the officer in charge.

The control room of a modern sub has a semicircle format with work stations for the different officers, the helmsman, the navigator, the sonar operator, the diving officers, among others. The sub commander can take a central position, or can walk from operator to operator where the action is at that moment and there give his orders.

Since most of the dialog is technical language, involving code names and numbers, the possibility of error is enormous. One misunderstood number can spell doom. Following is a dialog taking place in the control room with the radar operators. Notice that some numbers are pronounced differently to avoid phonetic similarities. Most important, all commands are repeated by the one receiving the order. "Sugar Tare" and "Sugar Jig" indicate the location of radar units on the ship.

Order: Radar search from one ze-ro ze-ro to one fi-yiv ze-ro.
Response: Radar, contact, bearing one fo-wer ze-ro range…
Order: Radar tracking party, man your stations.
Response: Radar tracking stations manned.
Order: Radar, track target bearing two seven ze-ro range…
Response: Radar, no contact bearing two seven ze-ro range.
Order: Radar, shift to Sugar Tare.
Response: Radar shifted to Sugar Tare.
Order: Radar, mark the range.
Response: Radar, stand by. Mark! Range…
Order: Radar: Shift to Sugar Jig.
Response: Radar shifted to Sugar Jig.
Order: Radar, report bearings and ranger to Plot.
Response: Radar, stand by. Mark! Bearing one one two. Range…
Order: Radar, make a PPI sweep and return target.
Response: Radar, two contacts. Bearing one one ze-ro range… Bearing one fi-yiv fo-wer. Range.
Order: Radar, get the bearing and range to nearest land.
Response: Radar, land from bearing thuh-ree fo-wer, fi-yiv to ze-ro two ze-ro. Nearest range… on bearing ze-ro ze-ro fi-yiv.
And so on…

After the black boxes have been analyzed, survivors and witnesses (when this is the case) interviewed and charred remains examined, the voluminous findings can often be reduced to a single word: MISUNDERSTANDING.

Since there is nothing we can do to prevent the tragedies that dominate the

evening news, let's list a few things we can do to make our homes, our schools, our congregations, our workplace and our community safer places.

1)When giving an order, making a request or asking a favor…

a) SPEAK SLOWLY. When facing a dangerous or stressful situation, our tendency is to step on the gas. Words that stumble lead to a tumble.

b)SPEAK CLEARLY. That means, choose your words. Ten carefully chosen words do a lot more good than a hundred disarticulated words spoken with a contorted face.

c) MODULATE YOUR VOICE to fit the background noise. Too often we shout when we should speak quietly and whisper when we should shout.

2) While we don't recommend resorting to Navy or aeronautical dialog, we can still learn from the professionals…

a) FACE YOUR INTERLOCUTOR. Whenever possible, observe his/her facial expression; make eye contact. In most cases, especially with children, their facial expression will tell you if they are getting your message.

b)ASK THAT YOUR INSTRUCTIONS BE REPEATED. This of course, depends on the gravity of the situation. This is applicable especially in the case of children. Simply request, "What did I say?"

c) SQUELCH YOUR EMOTIONS. Pilots, captains, military and law enforcement officers, executives are trained to be objective. The greater the danger, the greater the importance of keeping your mouth in neutral until you get your brain in gear. Wild gesticulation diverts attention from your words to your limbs and genders more confusion.

3) The greatest tragedies do not occur on ships and planes. They occur on sidewalks, supermarket aisles, break rooms, cell phones, youth gatherings, living rooms, classrooms…

THE REARVIEW MIRROR. Remove all the rearview mirrors from your car and you suddenly realize how important they are. Even so, from time to time we forget to use them. My dad's garage door had a bulge in it. I asked him about it and with an embarrassed chuckle he admitted he had selected R before OPEN. A quick glance in the rearview mirror would have reminded him that OPEN should come before R. Admittedly, backing out of his garage was a routine procedure he had done hundreds of times. He forgot.

A rearview mirror gives us real time hindsight. It's like getting the chance to correct a blunder before it happens. How does this work?

a) LOOSE LIPS SINK SHIPS. We are wired to feel a surge of exhilaration when we get someone's attention with a bit of interesting information. We may tell the absolute truth, without malice, but a look in the rearview mirror would have reminded us that words, once out of our mouth, are on free range. And as they are passed from mouth to mouth, usually with some embellishment, the chances of reaching sensitive ears are high. All too often the fallout ends up being a falling-out. The lesson: Words that are honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy, are hard to distort. You can turn them out to graze.

b) DAMAGE CONTROL. Ship crews are highly trained in damage control, especially in time of war. Watertight doors are shut, fire hoses are manned, medics are on high alert and measures are taken throughout the ship to contain and repair the damage. As long as the earth is inhabited by human beings, there will be misunderstandings—even with the best of intentions. That is when damage control must kick in. Do whatever it takes to put out fires and patch up holes. Most people—not all—are receptive to a sincere explanation of what really happened or was said. And, of course, to a sincere apology.

There are a lot of things in life over which we have no control. Misunderstandings isn't one of them. ▲

Life in Brazil

Balance of Trade

Monetary officials understand the importance of balance of trade. In just a word, it means that they hope their nation will export more than it imports, or at least break even.

If a positive trade balance is so desirable, why would anyone whose exports exceed imports be unhappy?

It's like this.

Here on the Colony, and outlying areas, we have some mighty fine youth. And like mighty fine youth in N America—indeed, around the world—they dream about getting married.

So far so good.

Most of our youth here in Brazil are bilingual, which, let's be truthful, is more than you can say for most of the youth living in the northern hemisphere. In a way, that is beside the point.

But actually, it isn't so beside the point as one might believe.

Northern hemisphere youth frequently visit Brazil. The Colony. On their first visit they really don't know for sure what to expect. They know that childhood stereotypes of an immense jungle infested with anacondas, jaguars and piranhas don't portray reality.

Yet, they are not prepared for the sight of flying into São Paulo at night and seeing lights and lights and more lights before finally touching down at the airport.

Then the flight to Goiânia, and then on to Rio Verde by car or bus on a new nearly finished four-lane highway.

Rio Verde, the home town (population approximately 160,000), is the prosperous hub of a countryside that produces soybeans, corn, cattle, as well as hogs and chickens for the Brazil Foods processing plant that slaughters 400,000 chickens and 5,700 hogs daily (put those chickens up in one-foot slots and they will create a line over 75 miles long that will have to clip along at 4 mph to finish up by quitting time.)

No matter how impressive these stats may seem, once these young fellows from N America hit the Colony, they believe they have found where the true beauty of Brazil lies.

The result is a trade unbalance you wouldn't believe. Over the years…

North American boys have married 19 Brazilian girls and taken them home. (This includes one couple who has married and is waiting for papers to be processed and another marriage to take place the beginning of January.)

Three Brazilian men have married Brazilian girls (two daughters of American parents or mixed marriages) and have moved to N America.

That makes a total of 22 exports.

On the positive side of the ledger, one young man born here to American parents has married in N America and brought his bride to Brazil. Two N Americans living here married N American girls teaching school here and now live here.

So that gives us three imports—imports, I might mention, who are making a positive contribution to the Colony and congregation.

Why the trade unbalance?

Far be it from me to try to explain the mysticism of love. But there is also a romanticism in crossing the Equator, landing on foreign soil where the language and culture are different, and finding some nice Christian girls who are not only bilingual, but also multicultural. They can cook and keep house either Brazilian or American style. And best of all, they can mix the two and come up with something really, really special.

However…

When something seems too good to be true, there has to be a *however* or a *but*.

It is becoming increasingly hard for the brides to get immigration papers—more so to the US than to Canada. We have one case that has been dragging out for almost a year. At the best, there is usually a five to six month delay. Depending on what the groom does for a living in N America, this delay can be quite costly.

In the commercial world for exports to be seven times greater than imports would only happen in dreams—or maybe in China. So why is it that we here in Brazil aren't all that excited about our feminine export surplus?

Look at it like this.

To have a balanced commercial trade balance, 19 N American youth should have moved this way and married. Think of what that would have done to our numbers here. And add to that the children brought into the world.

Alas, that didn't happen. So we must console ourselves knowing that our exports are making N America a better place. ▲

Readers Contribute

George Carlin's Views on Aging

Do you realize that the only time in our lives when we like to get old is when we're kids? If you're less than 10 years old, you're so excited about aging that you think in fractions.

"How old are you?"

"I'm four and a half!"

You're never thirty-six and a half. You're four and a half, going on five! That's the

key. You get into your teens and now they can't hold you back. You jump to the next number, or even a few ahead.

"How old are you?"

"I'm gonna be 16!"

You could be 13, but hey, you're gonna be 16! And then the greatest day of your life.

You become 21. Even the words sound like a ceremony. YOU BECOME 21. YESSSS!!!

But then you turn 30. Oooohh! What happened there? Makes you sound like bad milk! He TURNED; we had to throw him out, like sour milk. There's no fun now, you're just a sour-dumpling.

What's wrong? What's changed?

You BECOME 21.

You TURN 30

Then you're PUSHING 40.

Whoa! Put on the brakes, it's all slipping away. Before you know it, you REACH 50 and your dreams are gone.

But wait!!! You MAKE it to 60. You didn't think you would!

So you…

BECOME 21.

TURN 30.

PUSH 40.

REACH 50 .

MAKE IT to 60.

You've built up so much speed that you HIT 70!

You GET INTO your 80's.

INTO the 90s.

Then you start going backwards.

"I was just 92," someone says.

Now a strange thing happens. If you make it over 100, you become a little kid again.

"I'll soon be 101" ▲