

Brazil News



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Editorializing

The Privilege of Forgiving

Thirty-nine years ago, on August 27, 1977, Adilson Florêncio da Costa, then 13 years old was visiting the Brasília Zoo with his parents. In an act of irrationality, the boy climbed the iron fence of the *ariranha* (a vicious species of the otter family) enclosure, lost his balance and fell in. Resenting the invasion of their domain, the ariranhas immediately attacked the boy.

Coincidentally, a young soldier, married, with four children, was nearby and heard the screams of distress. Without a second thought, he vaulted the iron railing, landed in the midst of the attacking animals and rescued the boy who was hospitalized with minor lacerations.

The soldier, Sergeant Sílvio Delmar Hollembach, was not so fortunate. The ariranhas now turned their full fury on him and by the time he was rescued, he was gravely wounded, dying several days later from massive infection.

Exactly ten years later, the reporter who covered the accident looked up Adilson, now a young man of 23, curious to know how the incident had affected his life. When asked, "What do you feel when you recall the soldier who lost his life to save yours?," the young man shrugged his shoulders and dispassionately replied, "Nothing."

In a posthumous recognition of the soldier's heroism, the Brasília Zoo was renamed in his honor, as well as the auditorium of the Brazilian Armed Forces headquarters.



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Recently I told this story in my Portuguese Sunday School class. In another interesting coincidence, my nephew had just read a follow-up article on this incident. He sent me the link.

Adilson, now in his early fifties, director of a large retirement fund corporation, was recently arrested and incarcerated. He is awaiting trial, accused of masterminding an embezzlement scheme involving the theft of the equivalent of approximately 27 million US dollars.

(If he were to be asked today what he has to say about his new residence, we doubt he will shrug his shoulders and reply, “Nothing.”)

After the news of the scandal broke, a reporter interviewed the oldest son of Sergeant Hollembach, Dr. Sílvio Holenbach, an ear, nose and throat specialist, now practicing in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. The story he tells is truly inspiring.

After the tragedy, the widow with her four young children moved from Brasília to Porto Alegre (RS), where they had relatives. The children studied in military schools and lived on a pension their mother got from the Army. He says, “We never lacked for food or education. Needless to say, the father as a role model is always important. But I always say that the real hero in this whole story was my mother who managed to raise her four children by herself.”

Magnanimously, he goes on to defend Adilson. “I bear no grudge against him. We all have to live our own life. I can feel for him. In school he was taunted by his classmates, who called him ‘Adilson Aririnha.’ This must have put him under a lot of stress, although it doesn’t justify how he turned out.”

He feels certain that even if his dad had known about the choice Adilson would make in life, he would still have risked his life. It was part of his nature to rescue those in need. In several previous occasions he saved lives, once saving a drowning man.

We don’t know if Dr. Hollembach is a religious man. We believe he is. We don’t know if Adilson, the man accused of criminal activities, is religious. It would appear he isn’t. What we do know is that the Hollembach family has left us a beautiful example of what it means to forgive.

Let’s notice...

- **Love.** Sargeant Hollembach had absolutely no obligation to risk his life in an extremely dangerous situation. When he heard the screams of distress he and his family were leaving the area. He returned and saw what was happening. Without hesitation, he slipped into the role of rescuer—and lost his life to save a life. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* It can be added that someone who has this spirit of love considers *everyone* to be his friend. Even his enemies. No exceptions.



Dr. Hollembach, the sargeant’s son

• **No resentment.** To feel no resentment toward those whom we feel have harmed us, to feel no desire for revenge, is the highest form of divine nobility.

We can be certain it never crossed the mind of the Hollembach family to sue the zoo for not having a higher fence, or the parents of Adilson for not keeping better watch over him.

• **No defeat complexes.** So often when an unexpected wind shear sends crashing to earth that which is most precious in our lives, objectives and dreams go up in smoke.

They didn't lapse into self-pity and cry "Unfair!" for all the world to hear. They didn't accept failure as their inevitable lot in life. They stood up straight, looked ahead and charted a course that would fit their new reality. For life to go on it was up to them to make it go.

• **They forgave.** They had the option of cultivating a plot of unforgiveness for the rest of their lives, a "garden"—a misnomer—that for years, maybe generations, would produce only noxious weeds. Instead, roses were cultivated whose fragrance has inspired many lives—including ours as we read their beautiful story.

By nature we are not forgiving. We see a wrong as a debt that needs to be paid, if not in full, then at least with a token payment that makes the offender aware of the unmerited treatment he is receiving. To freely, fully and gladly forgive, asking nothing in return, is not of man; it is divine.

Corporations, spy and government agencies, as well as other entities that handle sensitive information frequently use polygraphs for security clearances. If such an instrument, also known as a lie detector, could be developed that would measure unforgiveness, the results would be astounding, most revealing.

In an effort to help individuals who unsuccessfully battle with personal problems and find it difficult to adjust to the challenges of family or social life, we must often listen to endless monologues—some tearful, some dripping self-pity, others belligerent—that list the supposed reasons for everything that has gone wrong for them and why they do what they do. It takes courage for the listener or counselor to wade through this swamp of woes and accusations in an attempt to point the "victim" in the right direction.

The bottom line is that an "unforgiveness detector" would probably find a point in the victim's life, an incident that occurred months, years or decades previously, in which the privilege to forgive was rejected.

Unforgiveness is a cancer. When a deliberate decision is made, never mind how justified it seems to the victim, to not forgive, a malignant tumor is spawned. Unless extirpated through an equally deliberate act of recognition and repentance, this cancer will metastasize and eventually rob the victims of their objectives and dreams, both spiritually and naturally. Indeed, this spiritual cancer can have a direct influence on the victim's health. The immune system of the human body has no built-in resistance for unforgiveness.



**Sargeant Hollembach
at the time of his death**

Unforgiveness is a boomerang. Those who refuse to forgive believe they are exacting tribute from those whom they feel have wronged them. They have at their disposal an arsenal of projectiles that can be launched at those whom their heart has rejected as unworthy of their love. Some are subtle, some not so subtle, and some openly malicious. What these personal vigilantes don't recognize is that all the projectiles come in the shape of a boomerang—not the usual boomerang that loses velocity the greater the distance. This one accelerates and returns with greater viciousness than when thrown striking the thrower in the heart. Thus it is entirely correct to say that the one who refuses to forgive is the victim, for truly it is he who suffers most.

Forgiveness—forgiveness that proceeds from a pure conscience—is easy to identify. It results in a special love for the one who is forgiven. Such a one doesn't ask if he *must* forgive seventy times seven. He will *gladly* forgive seventy times seven.

When you stop and think, that is the privilege we have to show our appreciation for the scarred hands and feet that bought our forgiveness. ▲

The Spark

When we vividly remember something for over 65 years, it must be impressive. My family was invited to the neighbors for a wiener roast. As a child, I was enchanted by the sparks that would arch into the sky from the bonfire. Most would burn out before landing. As I followed their trajectories, one made it all the way down near where I stood. With my index finger and thumb I quickly snapped it up. And ruined the rest of my evening.

Job's friend said man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward. That is indisputable. And it is also indisputable that some people seem to be subjected to a lot more sparks than others. Without a doubt, there are many factors that contribute to this meteoric spark shower in the lives of some. We will, however, suggest a possibility. Remember the little boy who burned his fingers when he chased a spark?

In our interactions at home, at school, at work, in church, in social gatherings, with business associates, in a word, where two or three are gathered in anybody's name, there will eventually be sparks.

Sparks are produced by heat. Among many other heat producing sources, we mention electrical malfunctions. Properly wired buildings and equipment have breakers or fuses installed to cut power when there is a short. Not always do they work.

After the incident in the Garden, sparks began to fly. Eve blamed "evil," Adam blamed Eve. And sparks have been flying ever since. We will not go so far as to assert that among normal human beings there are those whose nature is so refined that they can be described as "sparkless," but, if such exist, they can certainly be listed as collectors items.

We all have bad days, days when Murphy's Law torments us like a bad case of the flu. We find ourselves snapping back (read as: shooting out sparks) at those who are dearest to our heart. The only thing they did to bring on our reaction was to be near us at the wrong time.

It is a fact that during all our life we are going to find ourselves near people at the

wrong time. These “people” may be husband, wife, dad, mom, son, daughter, brother, sister, friend, alas, even preacher or deacon.

Lest there be a misunderstanding, we are talking about situations that develop with those whom we love and respect. We are talking about sparks, not explosions or crashes. But, behold, how great a matter a little spark can kindle!

Sparks have a short life. As I learned decades ago, a live spark can inflict a lot of pain. However, once a spark burns itself out, it becomes harmless. So here is what we can learn:

- When someone whom you trust hits you with an unkind word, remember this may be one of those unfortunate days when what can go wrong has gone wrong.
- Remember that you have the same kind of days and do the same kind of thing.
- Don't forget that these “sparks” have a short life. The wise man says that “if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.” Said differently, if what you have just heard has agitated your spirit, put your hand upon your mouth. If instead of reaching out your hand in haste to grab the burning spark and repay “a word for a word,” you can place your hand on your mouth, those few moments taken are usually time enough for the spark to extinguish. And you will understand how unthoughtful it would have been to burn your own hand so that you could take revenge on a loved one.
- This is so important. Do NOT put your hand on your mouth and then wait for the other party to come back and apologize. Forgive and forget. Don't give the pious silent treatment so that the “offender” perceives he is on parole, and will be until settlement is made.
- Let the spark hit the ground. If it still glows, step on it. The heel of your shoe is thicker than the skin of your hand. ▲

Remembering out Loud

Headlights

A law recently went into effect making it obligatory for all vehicles on state or federal highways to travel with their headlights on. For someone living in N America this is no big deal. You have been doing it for decades. Here, until recently, oncoming drivers would meeting a car with headlights on and blink their own lights to remind them they should turn them off.

This new law is progress. When we moved to Brazil in 69, drivers only turned their headlights on when it got too dark to see the road. And worse yet, when wanting to pass another vehicle at night, the driver would turn his headlights off, driving only with parks. I think the reasoning behind this was that in the dark it would be easier to see an oncoming car or truck.

A higher court has just issued an injunction that fines are illegal since there are few signs along the highway warning drivers of this new law. So, until signs are put up, fines are suspended.

We are now headlight years ahead of what things were like 50 years ago. ▲

110 kph Speed Limit

Most of our federal and state highways have a 110 kilometers per hour (68.4 mph) speed limit. Too many of our drivers seem to think that is the minimum speed, not the maximum, so they drive accordingly.

That mentality is getting to be a bit expensive. Town is loaded with strategically perched “sparrows” (pardais) cameras equipped with radar and sensors that record speed and—depending on location—running red lights.

Legislation requires that cameras and radars be identified in advance with a sign reading “Velocidade controlada electronicamente,” or something similar.

So, why would anyone ever get caught if there is advance notice? A good question. A really good question, that even I can answer.

A few days after speeding or running a red light, the traffic department sends the transgressor a registered letter. Inside is a photo of the location, the front or back of the car, together with the license plate. Since the owner of the vehicle is associated with the licence plate, he has the option of proving he was not the driver and tell who was. Since this is intentionally quite complicated, it is easier to pay the fine.

Beside the fine, each traffic infraction adds marks to the drivers license being charged. After a maximum has been reached, the license is revoked and it is necessary to apply for a new license—very expensive, time consuming due to a complicated course that must be taken, and humiliating.

In fact, it is the “mark” system, more than the fine, that troubles most drivers upon receiving the dreaded registered letter.

Tens of thousands of registered letters have been sent out lately. A court injunction stipulates that all previous fines must be paid. However, Since not all the radar traps on the state and federal highways carry the obligatory warning sign, these fines are on hold while the injunction is being further analyzed by the courts. Without a doubt sign makers (Radar Ahead!) are having their heyday. And drivers are crossing their fingers.

The question is: If cameras and radar “traps” are preceded by a warning sign, why does anyone get caught? Let’s list a few...

- Deep thinking (not about driving),
- Chatting with other occupants or on cell phone,
- Simple lack of attention,
- Oh shucks! I forgot the silly thing!

It is true that at this point a lot of drivers slow down for radar and then hit the gas again. But, as fines and marks increase, the Formula 1 mentality should slowly change.

And, since speed kills, wild drivers are gradually being eliminated. ▲

The Crisis

Impeachment

On August 31, in a session presided by Supreme Court Chief Justice Ricardo Lewandowski, in a 61x20 vote, the Senate ratified the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff.

Vice-President Michel Temer, age 75, was immediately sworn in as the new president of Brazil. He has promised that he will not seek a new term in the 2018 elections.

Popular wisdom has it that the Chinese symbol for crisis can be interpreted as “danger and opportunity.” Many linguists disagree. Maybe they are right, but let’s face it, the danger and opportunity version has been fodder for countless inspirational articles—and fits the political situation in Brazil like a kid glove. So, right or wrong, we will use it.

I have never made any attempt to hide the lamentable reality that corruption is endemic in Brazil. During the nearly 50 years we have lived here there have been repeated attempts to prosecute those involved, but all ended in “pizza”—a Portuguese term used to signify that they fizzled out.

Not only is the present political crisis dangerous, as Chinese symbology supposedly teaches us, but it is an infallible formula to keep a country from reaching its full potential. Worst of all, it places a country’s wealth in the hands of a few and castigates the rest of the population. Fish are handed out to the poor, but they are not taught to fish. Basic infrastructure falls into decay and public services are deplorable.

Thirteen years ago the PT (Partido Trabalhista), a socialist party, rose to power in both the executive and legislative branches of government. By appointing leftist-leaning justices to the Supreme Court, resulting in what could possibly be described as a quasi leftist coup.

Ironically—but not surprisingly—power was gained by the socialists by promising to combat capitalist corruption. And for the first six or seven years it appeared the formula was working. The living standard of lower-income families came up noticeably.

Then things started to go sour. Inflation began to rise, interest rates soared, unemployment put a lot of people out of work, and more than ever, promises made by politicians were not fulfilled.

For the last several years courageous federal judges and prosecutors have been investigating both politicians and big business in an effort to bring to justice those perpetrating the culture of corruption. Arrests of the most powerful congressmen and CEOs of multinational businesses are making headlines almost daily. They are shown being hauled to jail by heavily armed federal guards. When heavy sentences were handed down in record time, the new jailbirds began turning State’s evidence in an effort to reduce the time they would have to “see the sun coming up square,” as they say here about those watching the sunrise through barred windows.

The old saw that there is no honor among thieves certainly describes what is happening today. As those turned State’s witness start pointing fingers, it becomes evident that corruption has triumphed over integrity. It also has become evident that

the left, the paladins of morality, came into power and remained in power by doing exactly what they were committed to fight.

Thus there is hope that this crisis, the worst to ever hit Brazil, will transform danger into opportunity. Powerful politicians repeatedly appeal to the Supreme Court for restraining orders against what they consider coercion by the courageous judges and prosecutors who are turning their world upside down, and repeatedly their petitions are denied.

Economists are very cautiously whispering that maybe there is a tiny flicker of a light at the end of the tunnel, that maybe the crisis has bottomed out. If it has, it will probably be at least a year until there is an appreciable recovery, and then two or three more years until a certain normalcy has been reestablished. ▲

History

A Short Lesson in History

In BN no. 70, I mentioned how shocked Brazilians used to be when I told them that in the middle of the last century it was totally normal to bathe only once a week. Later my publisher told me that someone was “slightly steamed” because of my imprudence to print something like that. “Used to,” he was told was a hundred years ago. No objections, except that with a bit of arithmetic that puts my present age at around 130.

Yes, yes, that age thing is just a little joke. But did you know that much of history, as it is written, is also a little joke? The rest is a big joke.

Contrary to what you may believe, history is not a simple narration of facts. Modern history is a mixture of facts and artifacts which the historian interprets according to his personal ideologies. In case that little definition has confused you, we explain.

A fact is “information presented as objectively real.” We say facts don’t lie. But facts can be suppressed. They can be downplayed. Or they can be exaggerated. They can be distorted. Facts can be carefully selected and grouped together in such a way that they give an entirely false impression.

When we first moved to Brazil we had outdoor shanties. In addition to their primordial function, we soon found they were the perfect place to dispose of broken glassware.

If time should continue another thousand years, I can just see some imposing Ph.D. down on his knees sifting through the “artefeces” on one of the old shanty sites and suddenly yelling at the top of his lungs: “Sam! Come here! Eureka! I have just discovered why this people ceased to exist. They became glass eaters! Without a doubt it was a religious ritual, but it just tore their insides all up. And they all died.”

Sam, the young assistant, stares at his mentor in awe.

Yes, yes, just a little joke. But do you know that much of history, especially as it is written today, is a little joke? The rest is a big joke.

Most of you are probably aware that one of the greatest triumphs of communism was the infiltration of universities in the free world. Text books were rewritten to reflect history as seen through the left eye instead of the right.

Knowing the futility of trying to conquer the free world in conventional warfare, the communists followed the example of Balaam and used the power of suggestion. Even as we exult over the fall of the hammer and sickle, we fail to see the tremendous damage that was inflicted on the minds of several generations of young people.

We see the Industrial Revolution, which began in England during the middle of the eighteenth century and spread to many countries of the world, as a tremendous step forward for humanity. Marxists, on the other hand, point to it as the triumph of the bourgeois over the proletariat, that is, of the rich over the poor. In their version of history, that which we call progress, they call oppression.

Isn't only Marxists who disfigure history. Racists do it. (Hitler had his own personalized version of history.) Nations systematically slant history to reflect their own biases or interpretation of facts. (Do you suppose the US and Mexico have similar versions of the Alamo?)

And so what we read in history books can't be believed? Let's put it another way. When reading history, remember it is a man's interpretation of the facts and artifacts which he has chosen to use. Read with discretion. ▲

Shanties

I mentioned our outdoor shanty in the previous article. Even though it isn't politically correct to do so, a lot of interesting things could be told about shanties. After all, what would we have ever done without that ignoble little cubicle? And yes, they were definitely used in the US the middle of the last century.

Call it what you will: shanty, outhouse, backhouse (a hangover from the Dutch, I believe), privy, toilet... It all adds up to the same thing. But folks, it took character to find a flashlight on a zero evening in a raging blizzard and head out to the shanty before going to bed. It took character for a first grader to raise his hand in school and ask teacher for permission "to use the toilet," which meant making his way through two foot snowdrifts. (In fair weather it was a temptation to get out of a little studying by hiking to the shanty, but never in a snowstorm.)

The humble shanty was an epitome of simplicity and objectivity. Since just getting to one of these little four by four huts was in itself often a veritable tour de force, builders apparently saw a certain incongruity in affording its occupant any kind of comfort. And it makes sense. Back in the days when people had eight or ten children, and only one shanty, comfort would have been disastrous.

But there is more to this story. In the middle of the last century WWII had just come to a close and money was pretty scarce. So it was necessary to cut corners wherever possible. Of all the corner-cutting I think the very worst was going out to the shanty and where the roll of paper should have been, find an old Sears and Roebuck or Montgomery Ward catalog—with a limit of one page per customer per visit.

(Anyone who is smirking isn't old enough to remember.) ▲

I read...

The Professor

I read about a college professor, with a PhD, who was often called upon to make speeches in other cities. Usually he took the plane, but on one occasion when his flight had been canceled, by doing a little checking he found he could catch a train, since the distance wasn't all that great, and still make it on time.

Once he had settled down in his seat, he struck up a conversation with the passenger in the facing seat. The professor was a really fine fellow who believed that everyone is created equal. So the fact that he was a PhD and his travel partner evidently rather hillbillyish, didn't daunt him. With a wide smile he introduced himself, "Hi, my name is Tracy, and what is yours?"

"The names Gabriel."

"Well, Gabriel, we are going to be travelling together for several hours, so maybe we could play a little game to make the time go faster. What do you think?"

"Sure man. Sounds good to me."

"OK, here is what we will do. I will ask you a question. If you can't answer it, you pay me a dollar. Then, you will ask me a question and if I can't answer it, I'll pay you a hundred dollars. Does that sound fair enough?"

"Sure man. Sounds good to me."

"OK, here is the first question: What has four legs, a tail that wags and goes bow-wow-wow?"

The man thought and thought and finally reached into his pocket and pulled out a dollar bill. Handing it over he said, "Here take it. You really got me on that one."

The PhD felt bad about the man losing a dollar so he said, "It's a dog that has four legs, wags his tail and goes bow-wow-wow. But I'll give you another chance. What is it that has four legs, wags its tail and goes meow, meow, meow?"

Again the man thought and thought and thought. He pulled out another dollar, handed it over and said, "Man, you really got me on that one too."

By now the PhD realized he had bit off a bit more than he could chew. So he said, "OK Gabriel, now it's your turn. You ask me a question and I'll see if I can answer it."

"Sure man. What has four legs, a tail that wags and goes quack, quack, quack?"

The PhD thought and thought and thought. He tried to remember his biology classes to see if he could dredge up something, but finally he took out his wallet, retrieved a hundred dollar bill and handed it over. "Here you are, Gabriel. You really stumped me." He thought a bit more and said, "May I ask you one more question?"

"Sure man, go ahead."

"What is it that has four legs, wags its tail and goes quack, quack, quack?"

The man reached in his pocket, pulled out a dollar and handing it over said, "I'm sure I don't know."

Moral of the story. You don't have to be a PhD to clear 97 bucks in less than 10 minutes.



Taps

Paul Yoder, age 64, passed away on August 27, of a massive heart attack. He moved to Brazil 1972 when he was 21 years old to live with his parents. The Colony was still in its infancy; land was being cleared, houses were being built, roads were being laid out. There was no electricity and a trip to town could easily take an hour or more.

Being part of all this and seeing the Colony develop gave Paul a sense of belonging. Throughout the years he never lost his enthusiasm and his desire for progress. He will go down in Colony annals as a pioneer. Paul loved farming and had an instinct for what would bring best results. As I watched him farm he was a constant confirmation of my belief that the cheapest fertilizer a farmer can use is doing things on time.

Paul actively supported church projects and when church doors opened, the only place he was comfortable was seated in his pew.

My tribute to Paul, the highest I can think of for a colonist is: He loved Brazil. ▲

(Almost) Taps

Some of you readers remember a Japanese girl who used to work in my store, Marilsa Akemi Nakayama. Due to her natural exuberance she is unforgettable. After I sold my store she continued to nurture her friendship the one she had learned to know on the Colony. She went on to university and got a degree in business administration. From the time she worked for me, I would often have her proofread something I had translated. This continued, even after she no longer worked for me. I never felt comfortable printing anything she hadn't proofread. She was able to catch errors and nuances that other proofreaders missed. A little over a month ago we had a "Burns churrasco" (a barbecue of the Emma Burns family). There were some 70 people there and Marilsa had been invited. She arrived with her usual aplomb, going around hugging people and talking a blue streak. The following day she was rushed to Goiânia for brain surgery to remove an enormous aneurysm. Her condition was listed as "gravíssimo" (extremely critical) and little hope was given for her survival. Those who knew her prayed for a miracle. The family believes it was the power of the many prayers that pulled her through. Yesterday she returned to her home in Rio Verde where she is requiring total care. For her to return to even a semblance of her previous life, there will have to be another miracle. The family believes this is possible.

The last book proofread by Marilsa just recently was the Portuguese version of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, in preparation for a reprint.

Especially those of you who know Marilsa, please leave a little space in your prayers for her. We owe her a great debt. She has proofread nearly all of the books—some 25—and tracts the church has in print. We hope that the second miracle will permit her to once again use her talents for the spreading of the Gospel. ▲

This & That

September is considered to be the beginning of the rainy season. This dry season has been really dry. It quit raining early enough to where most of the second crop of corn was lost. This has caused the price of corn to escalate.

Our local fire department spent several days on the Colony giving classes in emergency procedures. I am hoping that for the next issue of BN I can have a report on all that took place.

Progress on the new John Deere agency being constructed along the highway GO174 that goes past the Colony toward Montividiu is in slow motion, doubtlessly affected by the general financial crunch that is slowing progress in all of Brazil. Once finished, I suspect the agency will be as modern as any in N America—or almost.

The Olympics held in Rio de Janeiro proved the doomsayers, those who predicted everything from inadequate infrastructure to vulnerability to terrorist attacks, to be wrong. Thankfully.

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