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Editorializing

The Demise of Civility

For those who believe that civility and chivalry are now museum pieces, I suggest reading **Scalia Speaks**, edited by his son Christopher J. Scalia and released on October 3, 2017.

It would be no understatement to say that the late Antonin Scalia, was the most influential conservative Supreme Court Justice of the past three decades, or more, until his death on February 13, 2016, at age 79. I suppose he could be labeled a “Mennonite Justice,” since his judicial philosophy was very much in tune with what Mennonites believe the Bible teaches. He was a staunch practicing Catholic.

If Scalia was the citadel of conservatism on the United States Supreme Court, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, age 85, on the High Bench since 1993, is a diminutive Jew who is the standard bearer of extreme liberalism. On virtually all landmark decisions involving moral or traditional values, she and Scalia were in opposite courts (no pun intended); Scalia, a constitutional originalist — the belief that the Constitution means what it says — and Ginsburg a defender of a “living Constitution” — the belief that each generation has the right to reinterpret the Constitution to say what the Framers would—and should—have said if alive today.

One more word on Scalia and Ginsburg, opposites. He, chubby with a cherubic face, she a wizened little lady who appears to have just eaten a sour lemon. He an ardent conservative and she a died-in-the-wool liberal. And this brings us to what this article is all about.

Both professionally and socially the burly Scalia and the shriveled-up Ginsburg were very close friends. She tells us that even after writing an opinion for the Court that was at odds with Scalia’s vote, he could come to her chambers to suggest changes that would make her views more understandable.

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Even more amazing, it was no one less than Ruth Bader Ginsburg who wrote the introduction to Scalia's book. Their friendship was authentic. Both were connoisseurs of the fine arts. They would go to the opera and other social events together. Very witty, even on the Bench, Ginsburg says that at times she had to pinch herself during sessions to keep from laughing out loud when Scalia would spout his humorous remarks.

And then there was Ronald Reagan, the master of affability, the reconciler, the man who distilled an aura of bonhomie. He and Thomas Philip O'Neill — better known as Tip O'Neill — were good friends. When Reagan became president, Tip O'Neill, a Democrat, was the Speaker of the House. The good-natured Reagan, a Republican, was shocked when his old friend, the rough and tumble Irishman, rubbed his nose in the dirt in the House. He was offended and brought the subject up. In his typical blunt style, he told Reagan that when the House was in session they were political adversaries, but "after six o'clock we're friends as always." With this little caveat cleared up, they continued to be close friends. Indeed, after being struck in the chest by a would-be assassin's bullet, following surgery he was taken to intensive care and no visits were permitted. Reagan, however, had a request: Could Tip O'Neill pay him a visit? His request was granted and when his friend came to his bedside he fell to his knees and began to weep. This was more than just being after six o'clock.

Civility, in a word, is respecting those with whom we have differences. It is the ability to carefully look at both sides of a coin and understand that truth is often multifaceted. Merriam Webster defines it as "the state of being civilized."

To survive in today's world, we must understand that daily we are subjected to a barrage of information, of statistics, of scientific conclusions, and of course, of opinions on every imaginable subject—and then some. There was a time when we could take most of what we read, saw and heard as being at least somewhat factual. We believed that most of it was untainted, that it was the result of conscientious and in-depth research. Assuredly, we would repeat these newfound facts or discoveries to others.

That was yesterday. Today we can shop for what we want to believe. We can Google up "facts" to build a foundation under whatever we have decided to accept as truth. It is easy to be swept up in the wave of "independent thinking," that the masses are allotting to themselves as a constitutional right—freedom of speech.

And speak they do! And protest! And demand! And threaten! And, of course, they shout—right into the lens of cameras recording everything. The expressions, "I'm not sure" and "I don't know" are fast fading from the American lexicon. People now have a definite opinion on most issues of the day.

Those who believe that the Bible means what it says should find this individual independence alarming. In a world that seems to be spiraling out of control, we face more perplexing issues in a year than our forefathers did in a lifetime. The words of Timothy, "For the time is coming when [*people*] will not tolerate (endure) sound *and* wholesome instruction, but, having ears itching [*for something pleasing and gratifying*], they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking *and* to foster the errors they hold" (2 Timothy 4:3 – Amplified

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Bible), are being fulfilled today in a way that would probably astonish even Timothy.

Needless-to-say, the original intent of these words was directed to the spiritual needs of the followers of Christ. Briefly, we want to broaden the application to include the “freedom to unrestricted independence,” so aptly described as “itching ears” by the apostle.

Unrestricted independence means we attribute to ourselves the right to believe that which pleases and gratifies our itching ears. Umbilically attached is the assumed right to boldly express our views with disregard to the feelings of others. In any society, religious or civil, there is a divergence of views. This is normal—indeed, healthy. Honest, sincere debate is positive. Not only is it democratic, but more importantly, it is a trademark of civilization. Even though Scalia and Ginsburg often were on the opposite side of judicial philosophy, they were civilized.

Lamentably, that is more than can be said for the majority of those who today shape the news. They are using specially minted coins that are heads/heads or tails/tails. Even though they proclaim impartial, balanced news—and yes, that they look at both sides of the coin—what they effectively report is left or right, liberal or conservative, hot or cold (climate), right or wrong, moral or immoral (with immorality being vigorously defended as morality), legal or illegal, constitutional or unconstitutional. All this is determined not by facts, but by the same coin which they flip day in and day out with the same results.

Most of us are on information overload. It’s free. It’s a mouse click away. An earshot away. It is like having all the libraries in the world under one roof and we can freely roam the aisles and select the tomes that will tell us what we, or our itching ears, want to know. It takes a heavy dose of self-discipline to not permit information to enthrone itself in our mind as a pervasive presence in which we are constantly invited to dine at a table that has been prepared, not in the presence *of our enemy*, but *by our enemy*.

All this has resulted in a “I know” mentality. When asked our opinion on an issue, we dredge up something we heard, or read or saw years, possibly decades ago—or maybe only thought. Our memory is fuzzy, but suddenly all that we “remember” metamorphoses into “facts” which we authoritatively recite. If no one contests our views, or simply remains silent, we feel we have made a point and increased the knowledge of our listeners. When this isn’t the case... well, you know what happens.

Years ago a leading Brazilian industrialist wrote a short essay on this subject. Following are his closing remarks, translated from Portuguese:

Of every one hundred people, only one has the courage to answer “I don’t know,” when he or she doesn’t know. The other 99 believe they must always have a ready answer, no matter what the situation.

“I don’t know” is an answer that saves a lot of time [in a meeting] and stimulates others to research in order to come to a proper decision. It seems so simple, but to answer, “I don’t know” is one of the most difficult things to learn in corporative life.

Why is that?

Sincerely, I don’t know

To not be misunderstood, I point out that to consistently answer “I don’t know” on almost every subject or situation is not a sign of humility or congeniality; it is not a virtue. It can be plain indifference or laziness.

Why is that?

Sincerely, I don’t know.

Rambling About

When Looks Deceive

Just a bit of an explanations before I get to the story. Some 35 years ago I had a feed and veterinary supply store in our local town. Back then we had only a handful of vets and they preferred working with cattle. Since I enjoyed this kind of work, I set up a small animals clinic—and was snowed under with work.

Some 25 years ago I published an article in BN entitled *A Model Couple*, which we reprint here with some modifications.

I have a lot of beautiful memories of people I learned to know back in the days when I had my store. One couple, in their latter twenties, stand out. Dr. Wagner de Souza, a psychiatrist, and his wife, Donata, a school teacher.

They were attractive, a model couple, that turned heads when walking down the street. However, their outstanding feature was their congeniality, their ready smile for everyone.

I think that anyone who works with pets unconsciously makes an association between the pet’s behaviour and the owner. That is what made Dr. Wagner really memorable. I can see him perfectly as he would walk through the front door of my store with his German Shepherd dog for periodic visits.

A German Shepherd is a beautiful animal if properly trained. When this isn’t the case, they are not only annoying, but can be dangerous. Dr. Wagner’s dog was an A+ animal, which contributed to my admiration for the owner.

While examining the dog, Dr. Wagner would stand at its side, lightly resting his hand on its head, speaking in a low, soothing voice. When given an injection, the dog wouldn’t flinch.

Even with his dog, Dr. Wagner was the perfect gentleman. I remember a rainy day when the sidewalk was wet. After opening the back car door, Dr. Wagner raised each of the dog paws and with his hand wiped off the excess moisture before it jumped into the rear seat.

The couple moved to Goiânia and we lost contact with them. Several years later Faith was reading the Goiânia daily paper when she suddenly asked, “Was that psychiatrist’s name that used to come to our store Wagner de Souza?” I told her it was.

“It says here that his wife shot and killed him last night.” She showed me the paper and there in bold print on the front page I read:

MÉDICO ASSASSINADO A TIROS PELA MULHER

(Doctor Shot to Death by Wife)

The article went on to say how that while living in Rio Verde he had gotten into the habit of beating up on his wife. After they moved to Goiânia things got worse. Finally one night they began arguing and at 3:40 in the morning she got his revolver and shot him.

All I can say, don't judge a man by the way he treats his dog.

Back in the 30's and 40's there was a man in Germany who owned a dog called Blondie. He was very caring and in spite of his busy schedule would find time to take his dog on walks.

The owner...?

Adolph Hitler, directly and indirectly responsible for the death of over 50 million human beings, men, women and children (more than six million of them Jews), by the war he started.

All I can say, don't judge a man by the way he treats his dog.

History of the Colony

The First Years

In November of 1968, the first two families with permanent visas went through customs in the Aeroporto Internacional de Brasília.

To give our readers a chronological view of some of the more important events in the history of the Colony, Faith went through her diaries (consulting her Mom's diaries where necessary) to come up with some of the more outstanding facts.

The Middle Sixties – The move to Brazil can be attributed to no one person. Different brethren were giving thought to the possibility of a move to another country. There were several reasons for this:

A desire to have our own schools. We must remember that at that time we didn't have our own school system in N America.

Cheap land. Good farm ground could be bought in different foreign countries for almost nothing.

Mission work. The idea of evangelization through colonization was present right from the beginning.

As those interested in a move of this type aired their feelings, an impromptu group began to form in N America, made up of scattered brethren from coast to coast.

February 21, 67 – Five brethren: Dan J. Miller, Denton Burns, Elmer Dyck, Harold Dirks, and Reno Hibner, left by plane to visit Brazil and Paraguay. The approximately 20 days they were gone made it clear there was real potential in South America. Especially in Brazil.

January of 68 – By this time the Colonization Board had become involved in the

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project. Three brethren were chosen to make a second trip: Glenn Koehn (representing the Colonization Board), Reno Hibner and Denton Burns. Enos Miller and Dave Giesbrecht were also present as interested persons.

This trip zeroed in on Brazil. Not only was land looked at, but government officials were contacted to find out what would be required to obtain permanent visas, if the Brazilian constitution gave religious liberty, and especially to know if our non-resistant doctrine would be respected. Could we have our own schools? These brethren felt there was an open door to proceed and the results of the trip were reported to the 1968 Annual Meeting. Support was given for a move.

November 16, 1968 – The Denton Burns family (with four of their children) and the Dick Toews family (eight children) arrived in Brasília with permanent visas. Homer & Hazel Unruh came with tourist visas. The first week was spent in a hotel and with the Otis Hostetler family (Old Mennonite missionaries) getting legal work taken care of.

During the first years the Hostetler family showed extreme kindness and hospitality to those coming to Brasília for business, as well as to those arriving from N America. We owe them a debt.

The city of Anapólis, 80 miles from Brasília, was chosen as the ideal place to set up temporary quarters. An enormous two story farm house was rented a short distance out of town where the three families set up housekeeping.

December 9, 68 – The Harold Dirks family (six children) arrived with tourist visas. They rented a house in Anápolis. The following Sunday a service was held in Homer & Hazel's quarters.

These four families investigated different areas.

February of 69 – Daniel Kramer, Enos Miller, Dan Coblentz, John Penner, and Daniel Martin Sr. came for a visit. The group bought a VW bus and began looking for a place where land could be purchased to make a settlement.

It was while travelling in the Rio Verde area that an apparently insignificant happening developed into a determining factor as to where the American Colony would be located. It was time for a check up on the new VW bus and Rio Verde had a Volkswagen agency.

While the VW bus was being worked on, a lot of curiosity was shown in this group of Americanos. With their limited Portuguese they explained they were looking for land.

The owner of the establishment, who was in on the conversation, had an idea. He knew of a fellow who wanted to sell a large tract of land. So it was that Manoel Norberto Vilela came on the scene. He did have land for sale. The land was looked over. The price was good. Very good. A tentative deal was made. Manoel was told, however, that the group wanted to go to the neighboring state of Mato Grosso and look things over. On their way back they would look him up and give him a final yes or no.

Upon returning from Mato Grosso, camp was set up on Manoel's land. That night the issue was discussed and it was decided that everyone would remain in a prayerful attitude during the night. The next morning a vote would be taken. It was unanimously decided in the morning to purchase the tract.

February 16, 69 – After closing the deal, the group returned to Anápolis. An

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organizational meeting was held, in which deacon Dick Toews was chosen as the spiritual leader of the group.

March of 69 – Eugene Unruh, Jake and Ike Loewen came to look for land. They went out beyond Rio Verde, on the other side of a little town called Montividiu, where they looked at a place so full of enormous termite mounds, that thereafter it was called the Anthill Farm.

During this time it was possible to drive miles and miles without seeing so much as a fence. It wasn't unusual for land owners to hold tracts of more than 50 thousand acres. Ironically, some of these very land owners were considered to be poor. And really they were. The land was worth only a couple of dollars an acre. It took between 10 and 15 acres of native grass per head of cattle on a year round basis. The herds many times remained small because of the high mortality rate of newborn calves.

It was the cowboy's responsibility to ride the range and bring cows that were about to come fresh to a pasture near the corral. A calf born out on the range had a slim chance of survival. The first problem was the fact that unless someone was around to "teach" the calf to suck, it would simply die of starvation (A new strain of brahmas has been introduced since then in which this isn't necessary).

Secondly there were the natural enemies, which included vultures, dogs, panthers, and even anacondas.

Thirdly was the very tropical problem of an infected naval, which could in a short time turn into tetanus and kill the calf.

When some of these land owners had a chance to turn their land for three or four dollars an acre, they felt like it was a chance of a lifetime.

June 1, 69 – By now the Unruhs and Dirkses had returned to the US. On this date the Toews and Burns families moved to the fazenda (farm) purchased from Manoel Norberto.

Rio Verde at this time had but a few paved streets. It was a sleepy place of approximately 30 thousand inhabitants (Today it is approximately 230,000). To get to the fazenda, the dirt road to Montividiu was followed for a little ways. Then the main road (if you could call it that) was left and a trail was followed that snaked through the woods.

Frequent stops had to be made to open gates, as well as to get out the shovel and hoe and fix the road to be able to get through. Finally there was no road at all. A very faint trail used by fishermen to go to the falls where Daniel Kramers now live, was the only evidence that man had ever placed foot on that soil.

The fazenda was an absolute work of art – divine art. The many rushing streams that emptied into the Monte Alegre were (are) lined with majestic palm trees. The water of the river itself was crystal clear. The placed teemed with wildlife, ranging from 20 foot anacondas to huge panthers and five foot lizards.

Camp was first set up by the falls where the Kramers now live. A beautiful spot, below the falls where the river widened out and the water was fairly shallow, was the place that cattle herds used to come through. Also it was where we crossed on horseback when going to the neighbors.

The cookstove was made up of some stones gotten out of the river. As the fire

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blazed away and the stones became hot, there was suddenly a terrible explosion. No one in the group knew that certain stones in this area cannot take heat. It was through God's providence that no one was seriously injured or even killed by the superheated projectiles.

Several years later we had a similar experience with our fireplace, when rocks used to make the bottom began exploding. Once again the consequences could have been tragic.

June 8, 69 – The first church services on the fazenda were held in the shade of a small woods where the Burnses set up camp (and where Emma lived until her death).

June 20, 69 – Progress has always been a mark of the American Colony. Today church was held under the stockracks of Dick Toews' truck, which had been placed on the ground and covered with a black plastic tarp.

July 20, 69 – The first Brazilian attended services. Pedro Pão (Pão, meaning bread, was a nickname given to Pedro because of his light complexion), crossed the Monte Alegre River to visit his new neighbors. The entire service was held in Portuguese. I suspect that only the Lord understood everything that was said. Anyone else who didn't have a fairly good grasp of both Spanish and English probably got little out of the actual words.

July 26, 69 – John & Alma Penner and son Eldon arrived in Brasília. The following day John had the sermon in a service in the Otis Hostetler home. This was the first sermon ever preached in Brazil (maybe South America) by an ordained minister of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.

August 3, 69 – The Burnses put up a masonite shack, known as the Cracker Box. On this day services were held in it for the first time.

August 10, 69 – Faith and I arrived in Rio de Janeiro with our two children.

August 19, 69 – Down by the falls, a brick yard was set up. If I'm not mistaken, Reader's Digest even had an article on the Cinva-Ram brick maker. It was supposed to be the solution to the housing crisis in underdeveloped nations.

It worked like this. Dirt had to be dug up and run through a fine screen. Then dry cement was added – 10% I believe – and thoroughly mixed. Just enough water was added to where a ball could be made if pressed tightly by hand. Now it was ready for the Cinva-Ram press. A very simple, sturdy affair made of heavy iron plates welded together, the exact amount of the dirt/cement mixture had to be placed into the chamber. A lid was placed over the chamber and the operator had to pull down on about an eight-foot long steel handle. If not enough of the mixture was placed in the chamber, the operator would come crashing down to the earth. And the brick would be no good. If too much was put in, he would find himself hanging in the air, trying to get the lever to come down. The brick would be no good. When just the right amount was put in, a good brick would result. Removed from the press, the brick would be placed in the sun to bake. The result was something like a reinforced miniature adobe.

Enough bricks were made to build a house and a shed. The house, the first permanent house on the Colony, built by Denton Burns is still in good shape.

I have never found out if Cinva-Ram block machines really solved any large scale

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housing problems. What I do know is that if there would have been very many around, there would have been no unemployment in that particular country.

August 24, 69 – Dick Toews got a roof on his pole shed so we began having services there. Each Sunday as we gathered for services the walls would be higher as they built up the walls with Cinva-Ram bricks.

August 25, 69 – John Penners moved into a tiny little wooden house they built along a spring.

August 28, 69 – Jona & Doris Dyck and four of their children arrived in Brasília with permanent visas. Now we had two ministers and one deacon.

September 11, 69 – Denton Burns built them a house out of particle board. On this day they moved in.

September 28, 69 – We began having services in Jona's house.

September 30, 69 – João Souto, Manoel Norberto's tractor driver (now Charlene Loewen's husband), came to the Colony and broke up a little piece of ground to be farmed. Thus we became an agricultural colony.

October 5, 69 – We began having evening services, in addition to the normal morning services.

October 8, 69 – Harold & Emma Dirks, with their six children arrived. In a pickup. That's right. IN A PICKUP. They drove all the way, except for when they loaded their pickup on the Queen Mary and later on a railroad flatcar in areas where there were no roads. I strongly suspect Harold would not do this again. They left the US the same day we did, but got here about two months later.

October 14, 69 – The Colony bought a tractor for all to use.

November 6, 69 – Enos & Clara Miller (7 children), Daniel & Anna Kramer (6 children plus 2 nephews), and Dan & Clara Coblentz (5 children) arrived with permanent visas. Enos Miller, a deacon, brought our staff up to four members. Homer & Hazel Unruh and John & Joan Unruh (2 children) came on tourist visas, staying until February 22, 70.

November 9, 69 – Because of the big crowd, we had to go back to having services in Dick Toews' shed again.

November 21, 69 – Harold Dirks moved into a little brick house.

November 27, 69 – The Denton Burns family, Homer & Hazel, and we spent the first night in the Cinva-Ram brick house.

We had been living in a little tent. It was approximately 6 feet by 8 feet. Right at the peak one could almost stand upright. Our entire family and all our worldly goods fit in it.

One Sunday afternoon we had one of the awfulest rainstorms. Faith and I were inside trying to keep the wind from carrying it off. Every little bit we had to shove the sides out to dump the water that gathered in the dipping canvas. Strangely the water somehow managed to come into the tent, but it couldn't get out. Finally, to avoid having it turn into the world's first tent swimming pool, I had to get my hunting knife and cut a slit along one side to let the water out.

To this day, nearly five decades later, one of my greatest pleasures is to lie in bed hearing the rain drumming on our tile roof. And not having to cut a slit in the wall.

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November 29, 69 – Daniel Kramers moved their tent under a little pole shed with a tile roof. Maybe they didn't like to live in a swimming pool either.

December 14, 69 – Dick Toews and Jona Dyck left for the southern state of Paraná to look for land.

January of 70 – We had our first Sunday School election.

The Toews and Dyck families left the Colony, moving to a more settled location in southern Brazil.

Homer Unruh and I decided to build a wooden washing machine with paddles on the outside. The idea was to set it up in the spring and run it by water power. It was a fabulous little machine, with only one defect. It didn't work.

March 14, 70 – We had our first school enrollment.

March 15, 70 – We had our first contact with the Russians, who live in southern Brazil. They were out looking for crops to custom cut. Later they began a colony beyond Montividiu. We have excellent relations with them.

April 1, 70 – We had a school meeting. Denton Burns, John Penner, and Dan Coblentz were elected to the first schoolboard.

April 5, 70 – Two nuns and several Peace Corp workers were out from Rio Verde. They attended our services. Then we all had a basket dinner together.

During this period we planted tens of thousands of pineapple plants. Because the land had just been broken up and the tough native grass hadn't had a chance to decompose properly, a fungus developed and most of the plants died. The project was a total disaster.

May 4, 70 – First day of school. I was the teacher. Classes were held in Dick Toews' shed. There were 21 students.

August 9, 70 – We all went up the hill, in the middle of the woods, and selected a site for our future church building.

October 15, 70 – Pete & Edna Loewen (8 children) and Reno & Marilyn Hibner (4 children) arrived in Brazil with permanent visas. After Jona Dyck and Dick Toews left, we were down to one minister and one deacon. Now, with Reno, we again had two ministers.

November 12, 70 – John Penners moved into their new masonry house.

November 13, 70 – Dan & Clara Coblentz came home today with a tiny little girl they named Diana Faith. She was the first Brazilian child adopted on the Colony.

December 29, 70 – Pete Loewen and Reno Hibner bought a tract of land, that borders the first tract, from Aristote Mesquita.

January 17, 71 – The first 12 kilometers out of Goiânia toward Rio Verde have been paved. That means we now have only 208 kilometers (130 miles) of dirt road to Rio Verde and another 40 to the Colony.

January 24, 71 – Mim Burns' monkey got loose and came to church this morning and tried to make friends with the preacher's wife. It turned out to be a very one-sided affair. Primates were not on her Christmas list.

Another time a kitten sedately walked up the isle, its little tail gently swaying, and right up to John Penner, who was sitting on what should have been a rostrum. Thank goodness this wasn't a one-sided affair. He reached down, picked up the little feline visitor, placed it on his lap and slowly stroked its fur.

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Other local guests to our services included dogs, chickens and a little froggie. Down in a little crack in the floor, where no one could be rude to it, the little fellow showed its pentecostal colors and made the rafters ring with powerful music.

To this day the regional fauna finds its way to church. In the Monte Alegre Congregation the men's Sunday School class is in the breezeway between the church and the social hall. Blackbirds, which incidentally are tremendous singers, love to serenade us. Also a pair of large green parrots likes to fly in occasionally and jabber in an unknown tongue.

March 5, 71 – A church building committee was elected: Denton Burns, Dan Coblentz, Enos Miller, Carman Loewen, and Eldon Penner.

March 7, 71 – Luis Duarte, the little boy who lived in the house by the old Rio Verdinho River bridge, came to live at Harold Dirkses and go to school.

March of 71 – Enos Miller bought a place from Geraldo Honório on the other side of the Monte Alegre river, across from Daniel Kramers.

We began our first revival meetings with our home staff as the evangelists. On Sunday, March 28 we had communion, the first ever in South America for the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.

March 24, 71 – The Jona Dyck family sold out and returned to the US.

Tony de Lima (now married to Juanita Loewen) began working for Harold Dirks.

The Russians paid the Colony a visit. They have bought land beyond Montividiu.

April of 71 – The second rice harvest. Thirteen acres yielded 147 bags (132 lbs to a bag). Two and a half acres of soybeans yielded 18 bags. The beans had to finally be fed to the pigs as no one in Rio Verde would buy them. The freight to send them to Goiânia would have been more than what they would have paid for them.

The Pete Loewen family moved into their shed, which doubled as a house for a number of years.

Enos Miller and Pete Loewen went to Goiânia to get the valves ground on a tractor head. Half way back to Rio Verde, they discovered that the head had bounced out of the truck in some particularly bad hole in the road. They turned around and drove all the way back, but never found it.

They took the partitions out of Dick Toews' shed (which now belonged to John Penner) to make more room for church services.

May of 71 – Jake Loewen, here on a visit, bought a tract of land beyond Montividiu, not too far from the Russian Colony.

Harold Dirks set up a small hog operation some time ago. Now he is selling pigs to the butcher shops in town. It isn't going over very well simply because Harold is raising meat type hogs and the people here are used to lard type animals. Virtually all the cooking is done with lard instead of cooking oil, so the value of a hog is based on how many liters of lard it will produce, and not by the meat it will yield. It took quite a few years for the people to adapt to this kind of hog.

Denton Burns made a sample church bench.

May 20, 71 – The Dick Toews family left Brazil permanently.

June 5, 71 – The new church benches were finished. They are being used to this day.

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June 6, 71 – Our first wedding in Brazil. Glenn Hibner, Reno & Marilyn's son, and Elizabeth, Denton & Emma's daughter. The wedding was in the Monte Alegre church and the reception in Reno's unfinished house with approximately 200 attending.

July of 71 – The Dan Coblentz family returned to the US.

Luis Duarte is staying at John Penners for this school term.

September 26, 71 – Our second wedding in Brazil. Eldon, son of John & Alma Penner, to Bonnie, Harold & Emma's daughter. The reception was in what is now Earl & Johanna Schmidt's house.

October 13, 71 – Enos & Clara Miller's daughter, Rachel, has the dubious honor of being the first American on the Colony to get bit by a poisonous snake. A jararacuçu if I'm not mistaken (from the bothrops family). She was taken to the hospital and given anti-venom. Her recovery was rapid.

November of 71 – Duane Holdeman bought a tract of land from several Brazilian neighbors.

Jake & Tina Loewen moved to Brazil. This old couple definitely enriched the Colony. They were a living link with the past. In one of our C.E. programs, J.G, as he was called, gave his personal recollections of John Holdeman.

Glenn & Frieda Reimer (2 children) from Canada came to spend six months here with her folks, the Burnses.

December 4, 71 – Ura & Rosella Yoder (5 children) came on permanent visas and bought Enos Miller's first place.

January 5, 1972 – We had our first Wednesday evening meeting in church. The leaders are chosen alphabetically.

January 31, 72 – Ura & Rosella Yoder bought seven Holstein cows, starting the first dairy on the Colony.

February & March of 72 – The mayor of Rio Verde sent out a caterpillar and two graders to build roads.

April of 72 – Jonas Schultz, Dick Johnson and Eddie Schneider were here for a visit.

June 8, 72 – The land was cleared and stakes were set for the new Monte Alegre church.

June 22, 72 – The footer was poured for the new church.

August of 72 – Work was begun on new church building.

November 18, 72 – The Peter Friesen family (three children) from Canada arrived with permanent visas. Six days later they returned to Canada. A record.

A Terrible Blow

Monday, March 19, 73 – The day Pete Loewen and Denton Burns were killed in an automobile accident and Chris Stoltzfus critically injured.

To understand better the impact this tragedy had on the little group here, it must be remembered that the Colony had been in existence for less than four years and Rio Verde was still a very backwoodish place. The road to Goiânia was dirt. Depending

on the weather, it could take four or five hours, or even more, to drive the 135 miles between Rio Verde and Goiânia. For all practical purposes we had no telephone communications with the outside world. Emergency situations were handled by the police short band radio. Also, we had never had a death on the Colony before, and thus were caught totally unprepared.

What really complicated matters, however, was the fact that Denton and Pete were exactly the ones who solved all unexpected problems. They were the ones who would take time off to help others with their problems. Finally there was the endless red tape that had to be cut so that permanent visas could be properly processed, land contracts registered, etc. When something new turned up, everyone instinctively looked to these two to take the lead.

We now backtrack to March 13. Back those days it was possible to come to Brazil on a tourist visa and from this end begin the process for getting a permanent visa. That is what the Chris Stoltzfus and Fanny Kramer families from Ohio were doing at this time. While totally legal, it was quite a hassle to get everything in order. In their case it was necessary to spend a few days in Brasília working on documents. Since money was scarce, Pete offered to rig up a tarp over the back of his truck and take the two families to Brasília. They would simply live on the back of his truck while working on their documents.

That is what they did, which is a story all of its own.

On March 17, on the way back, Chris lost the pouch in which he had his money and documents – including what was needed for immigration. Needless to say, this was most unfortunate.

It was decided that an effort should be made to find the pouch. It was possible it had been left at one of the places where they stopped on the way back from Brasília. And if that was the case, it would be almost impossible for the person who found it to let us know, because of communications problems, already described.

On Monday, March 19, Pete, Denton, and Chris left in Pete's VW bug, to see if they could find any trace of the lost pouch. Near Goiânia the road was under construction and all traffic was detoured onto some sideroads. It was near the little town of Santa Bárbara that a truck, trying to pass another vehicle, struck the bug head-on.

This happened towards evening. We have few details of what happened in the next hours.

Tuesday, March 20 – Life began normally here on the Colony. No one had any inkling of events taking place in Goiânia. In town different ones knew of the accident – very likely by radio. One of these was a young doctor just out of medical school who was putting in some time at the Hospital Evangélico, one of our local hospitals. Since Charlene Loewen (now Souto) – Pete's daughter – worked in the hospital, he told her that some Americans from Rio Verde had been in an accident near Goiânia. They came out and told Edna, Pete's wife that there had been an accident. At this point no one knew (or didn't tell) the seriousness of the accident.

Two young lawyers, who both worked together with our lawyer, Dr. Jerônimo Carmo de Moraes, knew about the accident too. They decided to drive out to the Colony and make sure people knew.

Brazil ¹⁴ News

In retrospect, it's hard to believe how slow we were to react here on the Colony. Not knowing the Brazilian culture very well yet, we didn't realize it was custom – this has changed a lot since then – to minimize as much as possible any accident or tragedy, when breaking the news to relatives or interested persons.

One of the first concrete indications of the seriousness of the accident was when Faith and Clara Miller stopped at a business place and the owner (a brother to Aristote Mesquita, from whom Pete and Reno bought their places) remarked, “It sure is too bad about those two Americans who got killed.”

Incredibly, at this point some didn't even know who the three were that had been involved in the accident. This was because Jake (Pete's brother) and Mark (Pete's son) had also gone to Goiânia. More on that in just a bit.

A small group formed in town: Mom, Edna Loewen and Edna Stoltzfus, the wives of the victims, Charlene and Faith. Of the Colony men, only Reno and Carman, Pete's son, were present.

The little group ended up at a house or business where they had some sort of radio. I don't know if it was a ham operator, or what kind of a setup it was. Apparently they had gotten word that someone should fly to Goiânia immediately and identify the bodies. Then more information came in. Pete's son, they said, had identified the bodies, and they would be flown out. It was here for the first time that it was confirmed that the fatal victims were Pete and Denton. Chris was in critical condition.

Edna Stoltzfus was taken to the bus station to catch a bus to Goiânia to be with Chris. This was a real act of bravery, as she knew no Portuguese. However – and if you will remember in a previous article, I mentioned how very helpful the Arabs in town are – a local Arab businessman was on the same bus. When he found out what was up, he promised to see to it that Edna got to the hospital once they got to Goiânia.

We now must backtrack approximately a week. Jake Loewen was hauling some empty rice bags on his truck near Goiânia. At a check station, he was asked for a document to prove the sacks were really his. Not having any, they simply impounded his truck.

Jake asked Mark – who by now spoke Portuguese – to help him get his truck out of hock. At a filling station in Goiânia, someone asked them if they knew the Americans who had been injured in a wreck. Apparently they even told them in which hospital the men were.

Jake and Mark headed out to the hospital. When they arrived, they were told where Pete and Denton were. But they weren't told they were both dead. I almost said, “Imagine how they felt when they opened the door...” but that wouldn't be proper. It is impossible to imagine what Mark and Jake felt when they saw their dad and brother, and Denton, dead. The bodies hadn't even been cleaned up yet. In this state of shock they had to make a number of decisions on what should be done next.

We must at this point remember that embalming wasn't practiced in Brazil back then, except in very rare cases – usually on foreigners who are to be buried in their homeland. It also must be remembered that Brazil is a tropical country and that by the

law of the land, bodies must be buried within 24 hours. By the law of nature, however, 24 hours sometimes creates an uncomfortable situation.

Now we come to Dr. Jerônimo, our lawyer, and Dr. Eurípedes, the chief of the passport office of the Federal Police in Goiânia. Not only were we good friends to both, but they were good friends. Dr. Jerônimo happened to be in Goiânia at the time of the accident.

I'm not sure what all they did. Apparently they both dropped what they were doing and went to work. It is said – I'm not sure about it – that it was Dr. Jerônimo who went to the hospital and told them to embalm the bodies. Had he not done this, both Pete and Denton would have been buried in the Goiânia cemetery, by the city, in rough coffins, as the 24 hour period was expiring.

Back to Rio Verde. The little group was told that the bodies would be flown in. After waiting at the airport for several hours, they went to the hospital to see if they had any information. Here they were told the bodies would be coming out by hearse. So the group returned to the Colony.

As word got around, the Colony mobilized and began preparing for the arrival of the bodies.

Around 2:00 that morning we saw lights coming down the hill. Two vehicles, the hearse and Dr. Jerônimo and his wife in the other, leading the way.

I will never forget what Dr. Jerônimo looked like when he got out of his car. He has a very light complexion and silvery hair. Both he and his wife, as well as the driver of the hearse, were red. They were covered with dust after driving over a hundred and fifty miles on dirt roads.

Out of sheer ignorance we made a terrible mistake. Knowing the bodies were embalmed, we assumed this would give us at least several days time before burial. We didn't know that when done in a hospital, under this kind of circumstances, is very rudimentary, meant to give another 12 hours time at the most, when the body must be transported.

Remember, they died Monday towards evening. By the time the bodies arrived, more than 30 hours had gone by. Instead of having the funeral by noon the next day, at the very latest, as we should have, we set it for Thursday.

One of the most beautiful aspects of this whole tragedy was the way Rio Verde responded. I mentioned that we had been here less than four years. I doubt that very many places in the world would do what the people of Rio Verde did.

Back then when someone died, little pamphlets were printed up and distributed throughout the town, inviting everyone to the funeral. This is what Eurico Veloso, the mayor of Rio Verde did – in his name – inviting everyone to the funeral. In addition to this, he paid a car with a loudspeaker on top to slowly drive up and down the streets announcing Denton and Pete's death. First a funeral dirge is played and then a grave, solemn voice announces who died and when the funeral will be.

In the tropical heat, the bodies didn't keep and on Wednesday the coffins had to be closed.

Through this all there was a steady stream of visitors from town and from the neighboring fazendas.

Our cemetery had been staked out, but we had never really given serious thought to what we would need in the case of a funeral. Now we suddenly realized that we needed some concrete slabs to cover the vault that was laid up with bricks and plastered. Once again the mayor came to our rescue and brought us what we needed.

Thursday morning was the funeral, the first service in our new unfinished church building. The bodies were taken directly to the cemetery and placed beside the open graves.

I believe that never has there been a similar funeral in the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. People came in cars, jeeps, VW buses, trucks, walking, on bikes, by horse and cart, on horseback, and yes, by plane. Otis & Betty Hostetler, the Old Mennonite missionaries from Brasília who ran the bookstore, came out on their mission plane.

The mayor was there as well as other politicians. There were doctors and lawyers. There were rich and poor. There were school teachers and illiterate. There were Protestants, Spiritists, and Catholics, including a priest and several nuns.

Possibly the most ringing testimony came from the priest. I don't know how many times he told us afterwards, when we would meet in town, what a beautiful service it had been. His words were, "I could just feel the presence of God there."

The death of these two men was a terrible blow to the Colony. They made a real team. Denton, who by now spoke Portuguese reasonably well, was the trouble shooter, the go-between, the expert on almost anything that could possibly turn up. Pete, who spoke very little Portuguese, was the man who made things happen. If someone needed help, you could count on Pete. Put the two men together, and things happened.

Pete

I think it was once when Pete and I were traveling together, he started telling me of all the vehicles he had owned in his life. He did it in chronological order. Understand, I'm not mechanically minded and there are very few details I remember about the cars I have owned in the past. But when Pete told me about his cars, I sort of fell into a trance.

He told me the year and model of the car, what kind of motor it had, why it was special (overhead cam, what ever that is), what kind of transmission, from whom he bought it, what he paid for it, what he did to it, what it did for him, and finally what he sold it for.

Enter car number two. The same story, except that this time he jerked the motor and put a Mercedes or whatever motor in it, he put in an automatic transmission, changed the rear end, etc. etc.

Car number three, car number four.... That man must have owned dozens and dozens of cars in his life. He could give the life's history of each one, at least while in his care. Each one seemed to have something special about it.

A kombi is supposed to haul a ton at the most, and that on good roads. One day when coming home from town (or going, I don't remember which), I met Pete parked along side the road. His kombi had a flat tire. The jack just wasn't lifting the load. In

almost hushed tones he informed me that “the thing has two tons of seed rice in it.” So what if the jack didn’t lift it? That was one for the record books.

Pete didn’t know much Portuguese, but he could talk with Brazilians a lot better than some people who know the language a heap sight better. Pete talked heart language and to this day people remember him for it. In town he loved to call little children together on the street and sing to them.

Denton

Dad-in-law was a carpenter. It wasn’t unusual to come into the house and see him at his desk in deep concentration. With his drawing instruments he would carefully design a piece of furniture.

What I never got tired of watching was when he went to his shop and began work. He would make sure all his tools were there, that his saw blade was sharp. Now, consulting the print he had drawn up, he began to cut pieces of wood. As he cut them, he would identify them with his carpenter’s pencil and neatly stack them.

Then, when all the pieces were cut, came the best part. He would get out his glue bottle, glue the joints, and put them together. What I could never get over is that everything fit. It was sort of like building Solomon’s temple. There was a time to cut and a time to assemble. He didn’t have to go back and cut just a bit more off, or junk a piece because it was too short.

I’m sure Dad-in-law enjoyed seeing all the pieces fit. But I soon learned there was something he enjoyed even more. He liked to help others with their problems. His speciality was making pieces fit. He would carefully study their problem, decide on the best course of action, and then go to work.

He was tremendously interested in the development of the Colony. As we bought land, the price slowly crept up. I remember how unhappy he was when someone paid 30 dollars an acre, if I’m not mistaken. He felt that was setting a precedent that would create problems in the future. What would he say today, with land prices considerably higher than similar land in some areas of N America?

He enjoyed helping others find land. Several days before the accident he took a kombi load of men to Montividiu – a neighboring town – to look at some land. The road was nothing more than two tracks, filled with water in the lower spots because of a recent rain.

Dad-in-law was so busy talking that often he forgot to move over a couple of feet to ride the ridge. Once when we got to a particularly long stretch of water, he remembered to ride the ridge. I said, “Hey! You missed that one.” Just that quick he steered into the ruts and sent water flying way up in the air the entire length of the mudhole.

He kept right on talking.

This is an overview of some events that took place during the first years of the Colony. There are surely some errors and important happenings will have been missed. We hope to do an update on this information and in the future print a corrected version.

Was it worth it? Without a doubt. A lot went wrong, but a lot more went right. The bottom line is that the church in Brazil is here to stay. ♦

Readers Contribute

Min. Patrick Enike from Nigeria graciously permitted me to publish these "Words of Elders".

Words of Elders

1. Beware of the naked person who offers you clothes.
2. When one's goat get missing, the aroma of a neighbor's soup get suspicious.
3. The future belongs to the Risk takers, Not the Comfort seekers!
4. A deaf husband and a blind wife are always a happy couple!
5. The first person you think of in the morning, or last person you think of at night, is either the cause of your happiness or your pain!
6. Be careful who you trust! Salt and Sugar are both white!
7. Kindness is like butter, it works best when you spread it around!
8. The walls don't only have ears, they now see!
9. Sometimes, you have to play the role of a fool to fool the fools who think they are fooling you!
10. If you have a mom, there is nowhere you are likely to go where a prayer has not already been!
11. A harsh man tells a woman to stop talking, but a wise man tells her that her mouth is extremely beautiful, when her lips are closed!
12. No matter how long the night, the day is sure to come!
13. A woman's greatest perfume is the fragrance of her man's success!
14. A wise person knows that there is something to be learned from everyone!
15. It requires wisdom to understand wisdom.
16. The music is nothing, if the audience is deaf!
17. None of us is as smart as all of us. Work together to achieve!
18. If you cannot be a bridge to connect people, then do not be a wall to separate them.
19. If you cannot be a light to brighten people's good deeds then do not be darkness covering their efforts.
20. If you cannot be water to help people's crops sprout, then do not be a pest destroying their crops.
21. If you cannot be a vaccine to give life, do not be a virus to terminate it.
22. If you cannot be a pencil to write anyone's happiness, then try to be a nice eraser to remove their sadness.
23. We can always be each others keeper.

Let us resolve to heal the world by making it a better place.

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