

Brazil News



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Editorial

To Build a House

There is more than one way to build a house. The conventional way is for the prospective home owner to sit down with a contractor and discuss options. The contractor draws up a preliminary plan with a cost estimate, which is shown to the customer. If there is continued interest, the fine details are worked out, a print is drawn up and a contract is signed.

In this type of agreement, if the contractor is reputable, the buyer can take an extended vacation for the duration of the construction, knowing that when he returns the house awaiting him will be exactly what he ordered.

That is the conventional way of building a house. There is also an unconventional way, at least by N American standards, to build a house. Read on.

The Perdigão broiler/hog project being implanted in the Rio Verde area calls for a worker's house for each module of four broiler barns put in. This is a laudable precaution that guarantees the worker a decent place to live. In a way, I guess one could say these are conventional houses. The suggested size is 24.6 feet x 24.6 feet. Packed in these 605 square feet are two bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, a tiny bath, a minuscule laundry area and a small porch.

Structurally, the house is very well built. The walls are laid up with *tijolão*—hard-baked hollow tile, 3x7x11 inch—and plastered inside and out with a stout mortar. The roof is covered with attractive interlocking baked clay tile. And this is where the quality ends.

The rest of the material: the windows, the doors, the plumbing and electrical supplies, the floor, would hardly qualify for an ISO 9002 rating. Fortunately, Perdigão permits the owner to enlarge the house somewhat, rearrange the floor plan, and pay the difference for better material.

But that leaves us with yet another problem. The construction crew. The masons

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probably make less than 10 US dollars a day. Those lowest on the pay scale don't earn even half that much. With that kind of pay, one can hardly expect that they will be topnotch builders.

Since we are hoping our broiler operation will be a family enterprise, we wanted a house that would fit into our standard of living. That meant drawing up a new floor plan with enlarged rooms, an additional bedroom and a veranda on two sides of the house. It also meant substituting inferior materials for others of better quality. But all that made the house an unconventional house. Even if I would have asked an architect to draw up a detailed plan, the workers wouldn't have been able to read it properly. So that left me but one option: I would have to talk them through the job.

The crew. When working out in the country, their first job is to set up camp, which consists of two shelters, the first, combined sleeping quarters and storage area, and the second a kitchen. These two shelters are home for approximately two months, the time needed to complete a new house. The shelters are made of poles cut out of the woods and covered with black plastic tarps. Especially the kitchen is a cozy little nook, spotlessly clean, notwithstanding the dirt floor and the one end being totally open.

The cast:

Nenê is a gentleman with one foot into the seventies. He used to make his living setting up homesteads for ranchers, which included building the rancher's house, houses for the cowboys and other workers, corral, sheds, barns, and possibly fences. Now he does the jobs the others don't like to do and is the cook (a mighty good one, according to my son who likes to have dinner with the men). He loves to talk and serve his guests a cup of hot *cafézinho*.

Dinair, Nenê's son, in his early 40s, is responsible for keeping material on hand and bossing the men around, as well as doing some of the work. It is quite evident that most of his building has been of a more rudimentary nature. He is not overly receptive to new ideas.

Gildo, the mason, also in his 40s, is tall and slender, and like Dinair has spent most of his time working on jobs that demanded less than meticulous work. Nevertheless, he is usually receptive to ideas, which he attempts to implement. In addition to being a mason, he is an electrician and plumber. He makes up for his lack of certification with good intentions.

Antônio Carlos, known as ACM because of a well-known Brazilian politician with these initials. Everyone likes ACM because of his intense desire to please. He is the *servente*—mason's helper, and cheerfully does most anything that needs to be done. An epileptic, he is on heavy medication. When spending a rare weekend in town, his weakened constitution is further taxed by his inability to walk past a bar door.

Valdir, in his 30s, is shy and seldom speaks. He is able to follow orders fairly well, but doesn't take the initiative on any project. He is distressed by any deviation from his usual way of doing things.

That is the cast.

Their idea and mine of how a house should be built aren't always the same. Even the

most detailed instructions are no guarantee that things will turn out as I had hoped. It isn't necessarily that the men are stubborn or contrary. It's just that they have a hard time conceptualizing something they have never done or seen before. And by no means does it mean they are always wrong and I am always right. I have learned some important lessons by observing how they do things and listening to their suggestions.

Knowing that there is a good possibility my instructions will not be followed, I make it a point to be present whenever I want them to do something that doesn't fit into their concept of building. Not always is this possible. I then ask the men if they could hold off on that particular project until I can be there. They agree. But when I get there, they, like King Saul, have gone ahead on their own, and pretty much their own way.

We Americans like things level, plumb and straight with the world. We go to considerable effort to line up our buildings with the North Star, the road, the street, the lane, or some suitable reference point. When staking out a house or shed, this perfectionism causes us to try for the last degree of alignment. A house with a five degree deflection from an established reference point—a road, a lane, whatever—would, without a doubt, be a perpetual blemish and possibly reduce the value of the real estate. We like things straight up, lined up and tidied up. Period.

My builders are not always constrained by such considerations. Had I not been present when the house was staked out, they would have “eyeballed” it in with a nearby road. A 15 or 20 degree deviation would have gone unnoticed. My insistence at building exactly 90 degrees to the road must have struck them as eccentric.

Similarly, when they randomly began digging the footer for a large concrete slab that would accommodate four 20 thousand liter water tanks for the barns, no special effort was put forth to make it perpendicular to the barns. Fortunately, when I showed up, little work had been done and they graciously straightened out their work.

It was necessary to lay up a low 2.5 by x 2.5 foot masonry box against one wall of the house that would serve as a junction box for some underground electrical cables. Nenê, the older gentleman, did the work, but somehow managed to get the outside wall of the box an inch out of parallel with the house. Needless to say, this hardly fit into my mental image of an aesthetic appendage to the building. In respect to his age, I said nothing. He informed me that this kind of junction box is plastered only on the outside. I told him that would be fine.

When I came back sometime later, he had done a beautiful job of plastering the outside—and the inside too! In view of the smile of utter satisfaction on his face when he showed me what he had done, all I could do was praise him—in all sincerity—for his beautiful work. Occasionally when I see that box, I hope it will remind me of a very fine gentleman who in human weakness went out of his way to please me.

These workers have developed a deviant approach to getting a house built. They constantly jump ahead of themselves, thus seldom finishing a job they have begun. They put the tile on the roof, but not the ridge cap, nor do they finish the eaves. They cement the metal windows and doors into place, but don't plaster the walls until later. Using steel wool they laboriously rub off all the mud splashed on the windows and

doors. Then when they plaster the walls, they must clean them up anew. They cement the conduit into the walls for the electrical switches and outlets, but often not the accompanying boxes. Quickly they put the wiring in and at a later date cement the boxes into the wall, having to work around the dangling wires.

They tell me they are urgently needing materials from town, so I run into town and get what they need, but by then they have decided to do something else. When I go to town I ask them if they need anything. They say no, but when I get home, they tell me what they are running out of.

Possibly what annoys worst is their inattention to detail. When laying ceramic tile, the mason has special spacers that permit a uniform design. Even though he uses the spacers, at times he will carelessly leave a double space, which, of course, means that the following joint will probably be unsightly tight. When I point out the flawed workmanship, he agrees it needs to be changed, and does so. The fact that the bungle is right in the front door entrance where everyone will see doesn't seem to matter to the mason.

Some of their techniques perch on a fine line between ingenuity and ineptitude. After the foundation is in place, a crude subfloor is poured, at the very most an inch thick. After the walls are up and the roof on, a second layer of concrete, approximately an inch thick, is poured over the top of the subfloor. Finally there comes a thin layer of strong cement, maybe an eighth of an inch thick, onto which the ceramic tile is bonded. It doesn't take a lot of constructional savvy to notice that the floor does have slight ups and downs in it.

That's not the end of the story. Since the ceiling is made of thin tongue and groove boards, some four inches wide, a light framework is built onto which the boards are nailed. This framework is "leveled" into place by measuring up from the floor with a stick that has been cut to the intended height of the ceiling. At each place where a brace comes down from the rafters, the stick is used to measure the height, which means that all dips and high spots in the floor are transferred to the ceiling.

A mason, a really good mason with a clinical eye, who sees this house, will see plenty of mistakes. Someone unaccustomed with building will see a nice looking cottage. But I, the owner of the house, am seeing a mansion. Let me explain.

What is a house? A house is a place to live. A house must be sturdy and offer protection from the elements. A house should be comfortable, functional, roomy enough so that people don't have to stumble over each other. A home doesn't depend on a fancy house. A house good enough to host a home is a mansion.

Before building began, with the help of my wife and son, I drew up a plan on graph paper segmented into large blocks that represented a square meter each. The rooms were laid out with doors and windows. That was about the extent of the plan, but it worked because my masons could read it.

From there on it was a matter of "talking" the crew through the job. It was, at times, a rather delicate balancing act. Yet as the house now nears completion, we continue to have an excellent relationship.

The Lord once told Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house where He wanted to teach him a lesson. As work on my house progressed, the Lord made it plain He wanted to teach me a lesson—a beautiful lesson—through all this.

There are those who believe God doesn't exist, and consequently didn't create the Universe.

Others see God as an impersonal being who had little, or nothing, to do with creation, and even now holds Himself aloof from humanity.

Then there are those who see God's footsteps through evolution, who believe that He holds the keys to eternity and that heaven is the default home of the soul.

A smaller number see God as a personal God who holds the keys to heaven and hell, and that only those who follow His precepts will enter into eternal rest (the lost are assigned either a purgatorial or permanent place in hell).

Finally there are those who believe that God is the creator of all things, visible and invisible, that He is immensely and personally interested in every soul on earth, desiring that each one spend eternity in eternal glory. Those who believe this way understand that salvation will not be a free gift, unless they also do their part.

Contrary to the theory of evolution, in which things just happened, nothing ever “just happens” in the story of salvation. Each page, each chapter of this story, has the imprint of the Master Builder. The second chapter of Ephesians tells us about a building, having “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” It continues to tell us that “the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”

This “building” is not a nebulous structure, nor is it hidden under a bushel; rather it is “a city that is set on an hill [that] cannot be hid.”

This building, which “groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord,” is being built by human hands. Like the house I am building, it has a print—a simple print. Knowing our frailties and limitations, the Lord didn't make an overall print that would specify the last detail as the work progressed through centuries and millennia. If He would have, we would have become bogged down in its sheer volume. Rather he chose to “talk” his workers through each step, and for this He sent His Holy Spirit.

We would like to believe that a building—“an holy temple in the Lord”—would have only top of the line workers, accomplished artisans, like those chosen to oversee the construction of Solomon's temple. Alas, it is not so. As I try and “talk” my men through the building of my little house, I think I get just a brief, brief glimpse of what the Lord must endure as His building “groweth unto an holy temple.”

Let's notice some parallels between my builders and the workmen building the holy temple:

Slipshoddiness. That means being sloppy or careless. Slipshoddiness isn't lack of understanding, of not knowing how the work should be done. It's simply not caring that the poor workmanship is marring the temple of the Lord. It's a I-really-don't-care-what-people-have-to-say-about-my-work attitude.

Slipshoddiness is admittedly no death sin. We can get to the place where we believe

that the important thing is that we do the job, not how. I can assure you that when it is *your* house that is being built, slipshoddiness becomes a *very* serious matter. So why isn't it when we work on the Lord's house?

Impatience. Impatience begets disorder. How many workmen have lost the way because they couldn't wait to implant their ideas? Yes, their ideas and convictions were good, but the Lord said, "Wait! My people aren't ready for this idea just yet; the time will come." But no, the plasterer can't wait for the mason to finish laying up the walls to begin slinging mud. The painter begins mixing his paint before the plasterer finishes his job. There is contention. Men quit their jobs in anger and frustration.

Impatience brings out the worst in others; it pollutes the atmosphere. In a natural building, one man's impatience almost always complicates another builder's work. The grace to cheerfully lay down one's trowel, hammer or paintbrush, and possibly find something else to do—maybe clean the place up—yields rich dividends.

It must be remembered that sometimes our convictions, no matter how good or on course, will not come to fruition in our lifetime. Someone following us, remembering our "dream," may lay up the wall we so much wanted to lay up. If in patience we can possess our souls, placing our pet project on the altar, we will be blessed as though we had actually accomplished our aim (and the one who maybe years, or a lifetime later, carries out our project, will also be blessed).

Inercia. "Resistance or disinclination to motion, action, or change" (AHD). The men building my house show limited interest in learning any new techniques. In fact, I believe that under their breath they at times mutter to themselves, or to each other when I'm not present, about my "new" ideas.

As the Lord "talks" His workers through the construction of His temple, they must constantly be open to new ways of doing things. Evangelization through the written page—tracts—is a prime example of how the Lord opened the door to a new avenue of service. The fact that it was never done before in the history of the church didn't mean it couldn't be done.

Inertia can manifest itself—and most often does—on a much smaller scale. The Lord asks a worker to do something he has never done before, but since he has lived 40 or 50 or 60 years without ever having done this, he resists.

In spite of all that we have said, of the dark picture we have painted, miraculously all is not lost. By no means! My little house is going to be a very cozy, livable cottage. And the temple of the Lord, built by weak and faltering hands, is today a beautiful building. Oh yes, it has some outward flaws. Critics are quick to find and point them out. They can often cite the name of the careless or impatient worker. Indeed, they go so far as to say these flaws are fatal, that the temple of the Lord cannot abide any shoddy workmanship.

This is the miracle. Even today this temple is being a haven of rest, an inn, with a welcome sign for all weary travelers.

Those of you readers who have had the privilege of being part of a congregation from its beginning will understand better what is being said. The church in Brazil, by

all logic, should have fizzled out years ago. As we look back at its early history, at the workers, at the strife, at the setbacks, at the cracked walls, at the impatience, we ask: How did this building grow?

We have but one answer: “So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” And, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it.”

So likewise we, after we have finished our part on the building, after we have with many mistakes and shortcomings attempted to do that which we were commanded to do, we must still say that “we are unprofitable [builders]: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

As I “talk” my men through their paces, I find I can ask only so much. If I ask too much, they will grow discouraged. And so, even though their work wouldn’t pass inspection in a conventional building, I find myself praising them, pointing out what I like about what they are doing. Not only has this avoided many unpleasant showdowns, but for me, it has blinded me to many of their mistakes. Yes, I still see them, but they no longer ruin the house for me; as already stated, today I see a mansion.

That, in a nutshell, is what I have learned. As the Master Builder “talks” me through my job, I am sure that time and again He holds me tight, He blesses me, when my work has been substandard, entirely too sloppy. His love and mercy have made up the difference and the building isn’t marred.

Oh yes, should I put in more barns, I hope to have this same crew do the building. I am very confident they will do a better job than they did on this house. And because of the lesson they have taught me, I too intend to do better work from now on. ▲

Brasília

A New President Elected—Who Is He?

[Brasília is the political center of Brazil, as Washington is of the US. Articles in this section will deal with current happenings in government.]

Sometimes we, who do not become involved in politics, have a hard time sitting still as we see events unfolding that don’t fit into our range of tolerability. Grudgingly we concede that since the Lord hasn’t seen fit to steer things in a different direction, maybe He has something in mind.

Brazil’s twenty-some political parties are in a constant state of mutation, with some sinking into oblivion and others rising from the ashes. No one party seldom has a majority in congress, which means that rule must be through colligation, that is, by a number of parties forming blocs. These promiscuous colligations are never permanent. Thus for the casual observer, Brazilian politics are utter confusion, and yet, as history proves, it is a functional confusion.

Our present president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who is completing two four-

year terms in office, for all practical purposes began his administration several years before being elected president, when, as Minister of Economy, he brought our 80% per month inflation down to a very tolerable 6% per year. History will almost certainly be generous with FHC, rating him as one of the top presidents of Brazil.

Alas, elections are decided by what the electorate believes today, not by the eventual verdict of history. So as Brazilian voters went to the polls on October 21, they rejected FHC's handpicked successor and by a wide margin chose Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as the next president of Brazil, to take office on January 1, 2003.

This was Lula's—that's how he is known—fourth bid at the presidency. Even his most ardent detractors must agree that he has at least one outstanding virtue—tenacity. Ironically, this tenacity, sweating his way through four presidential campaigns, has provided him with a great deal of virtual experience on how a government operates.

Lula, 57, is a clear break from the stereotype of Brazilian presidents. Of the past 29 presidents, nine were military men (field marshals or generals); 16 were of the legal profession; one was a doctor, one an industrialist, one an engineer, and one—FHC—a sociologist. All were well educated, rich and of above average social status.

Not so Lula. Born in a poverty-stricken village in the northeastern state of Pernambuco in the month of October of 1945—the exact day is unknown—his first years were characterized by abject poverty. His dad, Aristedes, abandoned the family shortly before Lula's birth. Their frequent moves from one house to another, according to Lula, weren't all that complicated, as they had almost nothing to move.

When Lula was 12, his mother decided to move to São Paulo with her family and find Aristedes. Unable to pay bus fares, the mother and six children spent 13 days on a *pau-de-arara*—a truck bed, probably covered by a tarp, with planks taking the place of seats.

The family was disappointed to find that Aristides was living with another woman, a cousin to Lula's mother. For a while he tried to divide his time between both families, until Lula's mother told him to stay away, possibly because of the shameful way he mistreated his children.

After finishing the 5th grade, Lula went to work to help support his family. After several jobs, he enrolled in a trade school, from which he graduated with the equivalent of a high school diploma.

In 1966, Lula got a job as a lathe operator, and it was several years later that events took a turn that would shape his life. An activist priest convinced him he should become a union leader. Soon he was director of the unions in the São Bernardo do Campo and Diadema area in the state of São Paulo, where much of the heavy industry was located at that time.

In 1969, Lula got married. Two years later his wife died of hepatitis, shortly before giving birth to a child. Fighting depression, he directed all his efforts into his union activities.

In 1974, he married Marisa, a widow, his present wife with whom he has three children.

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In 1975, Lula became the union president and spearheaded a number of numbing strikes during the following years.

In 1980, by now a seasoned leader, Lula, together with activist priests and leftist political leaders, founded the *Partido Trabalhista* (PT)—Worker's Party. That same year he was arrested and jailed for a short time because of his subversive activities.

In 1982, Lula made a try at the governorship of the state of São Paulo. He was defeated, but the PT, his fledgling party, did manage to elect eight federal congressmen and a number of lesser officials.

In 1986, Lula was elected a *deputado federal*—member of the national House of Representatives, during the time of the writing of the new Federal Constitution. his red star shone brightly as he fought for socialistic reforms.

In 1989, Lula was a presidential candidate, losing to Fernando Collor by a mere 6 percent of the votes.

In 1994 he again sought the high office, but lost to FHC.

In 1998 he again lost to FHC.

This time he was elected president by a strong majority vote.

During these years of struggle, Lula maintained a strong socialist profile, meeting with communist and socialist world leaders. As recently as a year ago he had high praise for Fidel Castro. (His praise was directed at Castro's health and education programs, which are both noteworthy—illiteracy is almost zero. The fact that doctors make a hundred dollars a month, teachers less, and most of the population is steeped in poverty is apparently of no consequence...)

During these years the *teologia da libertação*—liberation theology—of the Catholic church has used Lula shamelessly in an attempt to implant socialism in Brazil. (This movement has pretty well died down, thanks to the influence of Pope John Paul II.) The *sem-terra*—landless peasants—have had both his blessing and active support as they invaded public and private property.

And so, has Brazil's death decree been signed?

Lula has publicly proclaimed that he has changed, that his values have changed...

We have a saying here in Brazil concerning getting into public office: *Entra-se pela esquerda, governa-se pela direita*—A leftist campaign, a rightist government. This is more than mere rhetoric. As a youth, FHC was a socialist, with a number of books of socialist orientation to his credit—or discredit. A number of his principal aides were also socialists as youth. Yet, once they got into power, they were champions of democracy and capitalism. At no point did they even show a leaning toward socialistic ideals.

Will the same be true for Lula?

There are some basic differences between Lula and FHC which cannot be ignored. FHC is of the Brazilian aristocracy. Lula has made his way up from the very bottom. He knows what it is to be hungry, to not have shoes to wear, to live in a shack. He has seen his mother working like a slave to support a growing family. All this will have a profound influence on future decisions. I believe that he is deeply concerned for the poor and will do all that is within the new powers he will acquire on January 1, to help the suffering.

We understand that God is touched as He sees his creation suffering. We also believe that He is deeply displeased when the rich oppress the poor. Thus, we can say that God must surely be displeased with the social situation in Brazil. Has He seen fit to raise up a man who will take the poor to heart?

The minimum monthly wage in Brazil today is in the neighborhood of 55 US dollars. There are millions doing menial jobs (maids, office boys, etc.) who make no more. Other millions make two or three minimum wages.

In Goiânia, a city of a million and our state capital, there are thousands who make only a minimum wage. Yet in the Carrefour hypermarket, there are 40 checkout stands. Frequently they are all operating—with a 30 minute wait to be checked out. Just one customer can easily spend the equivalent of three or four minimum wages on just one shopping spree. The poor family must make it through the entire month on just one minimum wage.

Is it right?

Lula is an intelligent person. He has made his crusade against poverty a top priority. The question that is being asked at all levels is whether he will attempt to reach his goals by socialist ideology, or by creating more and better jobs through capitalistic channels.

He has two strikes against him. First of all, he doesn't have a majority in congress and it will be no easy matter to implant reforms. Secondly, 30 percent of his party, the PT, is radical, made up of died-in-the-wool socialists. They have supported him all these years and will now want their part of the spoils.

There are also some indicators in his favor. FHC has warmly congratulated him and wished him the best, offering any help necessary for a smooth transmission of power. It's doubtful if the president would do this if he was convinced things would shortly be going to the rocks. Also, the international financial community, which actively campaigned against Lula by pulling dollars out of Brazil, thus forcing the exchange rate up, are accepting Lula's indication for high office quite well and the exchange rate is inching back down.

On the Colony, what is the feeling? No one is panicking. Most are very calm about the situation. Most significant, I have heard no one threatening to get out of Brazil the first misstep Lula makes.

Just a little side note on our elections. All of Brazil votes electronically. By midnight of election day, almost all the results are in. Very close runs can take until the following morning. There is no indication of corruption in the electronic tallying of the ballots. ▲

Life on the Colony

No-Till, No Erosion, No Sand

For years the Mennonites were known as the agricultural pioneers and experts in the Rio Verde area. Today that has changed. There are those who are getting better yields than we, and on much larger tracts of land. This doesn't mean that the Mennonites have grown careless or less dedicated, but is rather a tribute to Brazilian farmers. Not

only are they up on latest technology, but they are extremely organized. I understand that a good share of them no longer depend on bank financing. A smart, debt-free farmer in Brazil can make money like you wouldn't believe.

Where it became apparent we were slipping into the technological shadows was when no-till farming came in. We who were used to impeccably prepared soil, planted in nice, straight rows, couldn't hack the idea of planting into a bunch of grass and weeds. It reeked of laziness, of slothfulness. Old J.G. Loewen (Jake and Ike and Pete's dad), when he still lived here, adamantly proclaimed that no-till wasn't Biblical. After all, didn't God send Adam forth from the Garden of Eden "to till the ground from whence he was taken?"

So as we continued to till our soil, building up terraces each year, only to see them overflow and gouge out the soil during four and five inch rains. We continued burning expensive diesel fuel working and reworking our fields.

But as we saw the yields our neighbors were producing on their non-Biblical fields, we began to wonder if maybe no-till wouldn't work for us.

The answer is yes, it works. I don't know what percent of the Colony has gone no-till, but I suspect it is well over half. Instead of working terraces up, they are being worked down. And beautiful crops are being raised.

This year brought on another change. Quite a few farmers spread chicken manure on their fields, with a minimum of chemical fertilizer. If the results are good at harvest time, another enormous step forward will have been taken. To haul fertilizer several miles, directly from barn to field, is a much better deal than paying freight for hauling it five hundred or a thousand miles, with the additional advantage of being organic.

In the long run, I believe that we will come to recognize that one of the greatest benefits of no-till is ecological. For those of you who are familiar with this area, the long hill—possibly a mile and a half—leading down to the Rio Verdinho River, on the way to town, used to be heavily terraced. After a number of years of no-till farming, they are now working down their terraces. We used to think they wouldn't be able to control things with terraces. Now they are doing it *without*.

Real proof of the success of no-till is the fact that we are running low on sand for building. All of our sand is pumped out of our rivers. The sand depot alongside the Rio Verdinho river used to have hundreds of tons of sand on hand. Today weeks go by and there is no sand in sight. No-till means no erosion, which means no sand.

This furthermore means that our water is going down into the soil and is replenishing our underground water supply, which should keep our many springs flowing, which will keep our river flowing, which will keep our reservoirs full, which will keep our hydroelectric turbines turning, which will assure plenty of electricity for homes, cities and industry.

How does the Mennonite farmer take to slipping out of the agricultural limelight? Very well. I think most feel a lot more comfortable with this lower profile, which fits our Mennonite heritage so much better. ▲

Life in Brazil

The Black Plague

As the dry season gets ready to sign off, nature begins announcing the approaching rainy season. Overnight the *matas*—woods, come to life, festooned in brilliant colors, a stark contrast to the sky, enshrouded in an oppressive haze. Earth itself proclaims the coming rains by releasing hoards of flying termites, huge beetles that careen through the air with all the elegance of a misguided missile, and an assortment of September bugs (June bugs in September...?).

I understand that beetles are an aeronautical miracle, that by conventional wisdom they should never fly. Yet as they unitedly emerge from the earth, one can't help but remember the plagues back in pharaoh's days. If he would have been bombarded by a really mammoth dose of these repulsive, stinky—yah, they stink too—black critters, I believe it would have shook him up something awful. All it takes is to get one of these *bichos* down your back and you're ready to agree to most anything. Now imagine having three dozen of the things crawling down your back and two dozen crawling up each pant leg...

There is no doubt, these unguided missiles are no respecter of persons, places or things. As they drone through the air, they drunkenly plow into anything that doesn't manage to move out of their way. Men, with their typical male bravado, can put on a fairly good front when under attack. But ladies, bless their hearts, they plumb come unglued. They can stay calm under the most trying situations. They know exactly what to do when a child dumps a bunch of baked beans on the dining room carpet during Sunday dinner. They know how to pick slivers of glass out of a cut foot and stay as calm as can be. Some can even fix a flat tire. But let a beetle grab them with their crooked, spiky legs and you can forget about everything you ever read about feminine dignity.

The aforementioned winged termites, beetles and September bugs make their debut when we have our first rains, as the dry season comes to an end. Dusk is their preferred time to emerge from the deep. The winged termites coming out of the earth are often so concentrated that they appear to be a cloud of smoke. They're a nuisance, but very inoffensive. The beetles and the September bugs are a different story. As it gets dark, all they can think about is getting to where it is light. In our homes we shut the curtains or shutters and turn off all the outside lights. When we come in or go out, we do it real quick like. That way we keep our homes pretty well beetle-free.

None of that works in church. Churches have a lot of windows and they don't have curtains or shutters. The front doors are large glass affairs. True to their calling, churches, all lit up, are like a city set on a hill that cannot be hid, for sure not from the beetles and September bugs. And with two or three hundred people going in and out, a lot of *bichos* make their way in.

And that's not the only problem. We live in a tropical country and depend on open doors and windows for fresh air. So when things get shut up tight in an attempt to keep the *bichos* out, talk about hot...

I think some of the children sort of enjoy the commotion. To begin with, they don't feel the heat like older folks. Watching the beetles zooming around on the rostrum, playing Russian Rolette with the fan blades...Wham! The children look at each other and grin. (Adults do too.) Wham! Wham! It's not every day that services are spiced up like this.

Usually everyone sits quite still in church. The children are very well behaved. But during the black plague, people don't sit so still. A beetle crash-landing on someone's head, or back, or arm...wherever...always results in some sort of movement. A few calmly reach out and carefully remove the offending beetle; others carefully take aim and send it into orbit with a quick flick, like when shooting a marble; yet others come in with a violent, preemptive swat, that bodes no good for the unfortunate beetle. And then there are those, on both sides of the aisle, who suddenly get up and hurry out just as fast as their dignity permits. People smile. A little beetle, weighing less than an ounce, has set to flight an adult weighing a hundred and fifty or two hundred pounds.

Fortunately, black plague season is very short. Yes, fortunately... ▲

International

~~Boundless Love~~ Borderless Love

Globalization is no longer confined to world trade and the exchange of technology. It's popping up right in church as marriage proposals cross national borders and hemispherical lines.

To attribute American/Canadian marriages to the effects of globalization would be inaccurate. These marriages were taking place by the dozens, probably before globalize was even a word. American/Mexican marriages aren't as commonplace, but do occur. When Sipke, the young man from Holland married the girl from Halstead, that would qualify as a globalized marriage, and the young man from India who married the girl from Ohio, or wherever. It would be interesting to know how many marriages of this type we have in the church.

There have been a number of N American/Brazilian marriages, but always involving Brazilians who had been adopted and raised in American homes, or, as was the case of Lucélia Duarte, who got her education in our church schools, and consequently speaks fluent English. Lucélia married Darryl Goossen from Saskatchewan, Canada.

The recent marriage of Eduardo Vieira da Silva, from Patos, Paraíba, Brazil, to Susan Koehn, from Crooked Creek, Alberta, Canada, is a solid case of matrimonial globalization.

The state of Paraíba, where Eduardo was born, is considered to be one of the poorer states in Brazil. And yet—call it coincidence, call it what you will—our members from the mission in Patos show no emotional sequelae from their

impoverished childhood. Much to the contrary, they are solid citizens and useful brethren in the church. Their initiative to broaden their horizons by self-education sets them apart from many others.

Eduardo is my office assistant. Imagine my surprise when he came to work and I found he was computer knowledgeable and totally at ease with MS Word. He sat down and began translating articles out of the *Messenger of Truth*. About his only questions on language were concerning idiomatic expressions and some of the peculiarities of Mennonite terminology. His private study of linguistics, of the structure of all major languages, would permit him to speak intelligently with those who pursue linguistics academically.

Eduardo learned to know Susan several years ago when she taught school in Patos for the missionary's children. He felt that special something that people feel for someone special, but because of the circumstances and what it would take for this dream to come true, he concluded that he was in no position to dream. He dropped the issue.

Time went by and as he thought of getting on with life, things looked hazy... except for a tiny light, way out in the distance. A tiny light that wouldn't go out. He prayed about it and finally spoke to his pastor, who sent the proposal thousands of miles north. When the answer came back, Eduardo was all smiles (and he's still smiling today).

Now came the down-to-earth part. Would the Canadian consulate issue him a visa? What would be the complications of getting married there? Would he have to stay there for an undetermined period after getting married while papers were being worked out?

He took one thing at a time. First he went to São Paulo for an interview at the Canadian Consulate. After the perfunctory questions, the lady asked where he would be going in Canada.

To Pincher Creek, Alberta.

To see anyone in particular?

Ah, yes, to see Mrs. Violet Koehn.

Does she by any chance have a daughter?

Yes, she does.

Would she be your girlfriend?

Actually, I'm going there to marry her.

The girl grinned. Such honesty is rare in her office. She excused herself, saying she would see what her boss thought. In a few minutes she was back. He returned to Rio Verde with his visa.

From there on everything fell into place. He got his ticket to Canada, they got married, they returned to Brazil. Her permanent visa will be worked out from this end.

They say marriages are made in heaven. If so, the good Lord must be changing some rules. Can you imagine back in Menno Simon's time, or even a hundred years ago, He asking a young man to travel five thousand miles one way to get his bride? ▲

This & That

On Aug. 1, the Adejenes Lima family moved onto the farm they purchased from Elias & Colleen Stoltzfus.

Kendra Schultz, who now lives in Moundridge, was here for a short visit.

Ministers Mark Loewen and Arlo Hibner were to the Pirenópolis Cong. for revival meetings.

On Aug. 9, Marcos & Wanda Duarte had a girl, LeighAnne.

On Aug. 18, Eduardo & Susan's wedding was phoned to the Monte Alegre Cong.

Lana Wiggers from Mississippi is teaching at the Monte Alegre School this term.

Becky, dau. of Dan & Marlene Kramer, from the Boa Esperança Cong. in Mato Grosso, is teaching the missionary's—John & Sheila Kramer's—children on the Acaraú mission.

On Aug. 18, the Monte Alegre Cong. had a farewell for Milton & Cindy Loewen and children, who will be serving on the Patos mission, taking the place of Dan & Joleen Peaster, who have returned to the US.

Leo & Mim Dirks, Jair & Connie da Costa and Chris & Anita Stoltzfus, together with their families, have moved to what is now the new settlement in the state of Tocantins. I have been trying to get them to send me a report and map on their settlement, but until today... Either they are very busy, or there's nothing special over there to write about. (That should get results.)

On Aug. 25, Jonas & Grace Marques had a boy, Jonas Jr.

Min. Dean Mininger and Dea. John Unruh held meetings at the Goiânia mission.

On Aug. 26, school started in the Monte Alegre School. The Rio Verdinho students are being bussed in this year.

Julita, dau. of William & Miriam Coblentz, from Ohio, is teaching the missionary's children in Patos.

On Sept. 10 was Eduardo & Susan's reception at the Monte Alegre Cong.

On Sept. 13, Robert & Angie Warkentin had a girl, Larissa.

On Sept 15, André, son of Sebastião & Aparecida Passos and Adrienne, dau. of Arlo & Priscilla Hibner, were married at the Monte Alegre Cong.

Min. Mark Loewen & Dea. Sebastião de Sá, from the Pirenópolis Cong., were to Patos and Acaraú for meetings.

On Sept. 29, Márcio, son of Carlos & Silvani Ambrósio and Wendy, dau. of Eldon & Bonnie Penner were married at the Monte Alegre Cong.

Once again we apologize for being so far behind on getting BN in the mail. Don't blame the publisher; blame me. Hopefully, with the house built, I will be able to get things back to normal in the next several months.

Facts & Figures

Temperatures

August

High	36.2°C	97°F
Low	11.0°C	52°F
Av high	33.6°C	93°F
Av low	14.2°C	58°F

September

High	37.4°C	99°F
Low	3.0°C	37°F
Av high	33.1°C	92°F
Av low	16.2°C	61°F

Rainfall

August — 5 mm (.2 inches)

September — 54 mm (2.1 inches)

Relative Humidity — Hi 81% — Low 33% — Av 52%

Exchange Rate

As Lula went up in the polls, so did the exchange rate, reaching a high of 4:1, that is, it took four reals to buy one dollar. Once he was elected, it began to recede, hitting a low of 3.55. Nevertheless, the market continues volatile. One misstatement on Lula's part can put the dollar into orbit. It continues to be an excellent time to invest money in Brazil because of the favorable exchange rate for investments, but is disastrous for anyone wanting to travel in N America. Debts made in Brazil based on the dollar have more than doubled in the last six months or so. At this point the smart economists are showing their smartness by not making any predictions as to what the dollar will do. As Brazilians say, *Só Deus sabe*.