

Brazil News



No. 139
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Editorial

One More Chance

[My wife found this article in my files. It was written quite a few years ago when a very close friend lost the way. I don't believe it was ever printed before, or even read in public. The original title was Deceit.]

“Come,” said the stranger, “and learn.”

Taking me by the hand, he lead me to a vantage point.

There, in minute detail, I saw a narrow path.

At frequent intervals I beheld what appeared to be families, walking this way together:

Father,

Mother,

Children.

In what appeared to be a predetermined speed, each family walked down this path. Sporadically, I heard the pealing of a bell—the kind of bell that announces the passing of yet another soul into eternity.

Turning to the stranger, I asked:

“Please, sir, why does the bell toll?”

For the dead,” was his solemn answer.

“For the dead?”

“Yes, for the dead. You see, the many souls walking down this path. When the bell tolls, one of them has strayed and had a fatal accident.”

“But why would someone stray?” I asked.

“Simple. There is but one rule that must be followed:

Stray not.

Neither to the left nor to the right.

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This is the King's Highway.

Remain in the middle.

Only this.”

Thus I carefully beheld the path to see if there were any danger spots.

There were none.

Rather, I was filled with admiration as I beheld the absolute perfection and safety of the path.

This, I knew, was the work of a Master Engineer, for not the smallest detail had been overlooked.

Indeed, so perfect was this way that even a fool needed not err thereon.

Having carefully examined the way, my attention was drawn to something most interesting:

The sides of the road.

As far as I could see, there was a panorama of changing scenes.

Again I turned to the stranger and inquired:

“Why the immense diversity of scenes: I behold...

rushing rivers,

lush meadows,

rugged precipices,

inviting forrests,

steep mountainsides,

wildflowers,

treacherous quicksand...”

I continue:

“What impresses me most are the paths leading off this one. They too, are of every description:

Some are very narrow;

Others are wide;

Some lead to large cities;

Others to mysterious places;

Some look just like this path;

Paths of every sort.”

The stranger senses my confusion and asks:

“Can you see any difference in these paths?”

“Yes, I see some differences, but also a lot of similarities. In fact, some of them look more appealing than the main path.”

“Pay close attention. All the paths that lead off the main path have one thing in common. What is it?”

We stop and I intently study the scene before me.

Then I see it!

I tell the stranger:

“The main path constantly goes upward; all the others slowly go downward...”

Some very slightly,
Some more noticeably,
But they all go downward.”

The stranger nods his head in agreement.

“You have observed well,” he tells me.

I am still confused.

“I see paths that seem to be fairer and safer than the main one; I see no snares on them, while on the main path I see snares and pitfalls on either side.”

The stranger looks at me inquisitively, inviting me to continue.

“If some of the paths that lead off the main one are both safer and more attractive, why can’t they be taken?”

With both hands the stranger turns my head until I find myself focusing on a family walking on the path.

Magically I zoom in on them,
Seeing all they do,
Hearing all they say.

The family I zoomed in on consisted of
the parents
and four small children.

It was a pleasant scene,
as the parents oft instructed the children as to the dangers of the roadside.

“The middle of the road,” they told their children,
“is always the safest place.”

As I watched this family, different times I heard the bell toll in the distance.
Time passed rapidly and I saw the small children turn into energetic teen-agers.
Everything seemed to be going well, except for one small item I observed.

In the beginning I thought nothing of it, but as time went on, I realized it must have some significance.

Whenever a forrest was approached, father would edge off to the roadside, just a little closer to the towering trees.

Several times he even took to paths that ran parallel to the main road and stayed there, until family and friends called him back.

Reluctantly he would return.

This happened repeatedly.

Then one day something occurred that made my heart beat in apprehension.

I saw the father, in spite of many warnings, edge off the main road and onto a side road that led into the forrest.

He assured everyone that all would be okay,
that he would soon catch a road back on up ahead.

But from my vantage point, I could see things he couldn’t see.

Ahead, where the trees were especially high,
and the sun hardly penetrated the forrest floor,

a deep ravine crossed the road.
I watched as he neared the danger spot...
Someone must warn him!
I noticed that on the side roads, no one warned his brother, as on the main path.
Everyone did as he pleased.
Each step brought this father closer to the ravine.
As he observed the towering trees, a smile lingered on his face,
as he got closer,
and closer,
and closer,
to the ravine.
After all, it was for this path that his heart yearned.
By now I was beside myself.
I began to yell,
as loud as I could,
“LOOK AT THE ROAD!
WATCH YOUR STEP!”
But my words didn’t penetrate the dense forrest.
Five more steps...,
yet he smiles.
Four more steps...
Is he blind?!
Three more steps...
He suspects nothing.
Two more steps...
Now he’ll look—surely!
One more step...
Stop! There’s still time!
No more...!
A sudden scream.
A thrashing of arms and legs.
A dull thud.
Silence.
Absolute silence.
(Except for the tolling of the bell.)
I look at the stranger and almost beside myself, shout:
Why did you let it happen?
Why didn’t you do something?”
He takes me by the hand, and says:
There is more to be seen;
There is more to learn.”
Unwillingly, I listen.

“You wanted me to do something, but what could I do that his family and loved ones hadn’t already done?”

His heart was hardened to admonition; though I should have stood before him to bar the way, he would have shoved me aside.

You will agree with me that the road was perfect.

Have you seen one ravine in the main road?

Or a single dangerous spot?

Can anyone be blamed for this father’s death?”

“No,” I said, “He died because he deliberately chose the wrong way.”

The stranger looks me straight in the eye, and asks:

“Would you like to talk to the father who just died?”

“How?” I ask astonished. “He just died, didn’t he?”

“Yes, he died, he perished, yet he lives.”

Suddenly I am face to face with the one for whom the bell just tolled. Before I can say a word, he begins speaking:

Deceived!

Yes, I was deceived.

Do you know what it means to be deceived?

It is to permit yourself to believe a lie.

It is to get onto the wrong road, and even though you are alone, to believe that you are right and everyone else is wrong.

It is like taking drugs; it takes your sins, distorts them into virtues and makes you feel like now you have vision, now you can understand the mysteries of life.

It is being able to justify anything you do and at the same time see all the evil in your brother.

It is hearing your brethren tell you, ‘Beware!’ and yet feel little desire and no power to change.

It is being able to read the Word, the writings of the church and other religious material and commit it to memory, to be able to discourse and pray eloquently, and at the same time be a rattling skeleton.

It is being able to understand and see a solution for all the problems existing in the church, and feeling irritated with the leaders, as well as others, for their refusal to accept your solutions.

It is to confuse the voice of God with the voice of Satan.

It is to regard religion mathematically, that is, two good deeds cancel out one bad one.

Let me tell you that to be deceived is not something that happens overnight.

Deception doesn’t begin with a great sin. It begins with an unrepented sideways glance.

When you are in the middle of the road, looking ahead toward the Sun of Righteousness, there is no power that can ever lead you astray or deceive you.

The pathway of life is well marked. The Word and the Spirit guide the sincere

Christian into all righteousness, and where there is righteousness, there cannot be deception.

When I began to cast glances to the side of the road, the Spirit reproved me. However, as I wilfully continued in my own way, the voice of the Spirit grew fainter and fainter. Nevertheless, time and time again He called me. Each time I wilfully rejected Him. Finally I forgot what it was like when He talked to me. That's when I lost my brakes.

It's a terrible thing to lose one's brakes. Suddenly anything and everything becomes permissible in one's life. When this happens and one begins serving the author of death, even taking another life can be justified.

When the Bible says, "Be not deceived..." it is talking to every born-again Christian. Deception comes by sin, and then more sin comes by deception. It is a vicious circle.

Back in the time of the children of Israel, a look at the brazen serpent was enough to save. Let me tell you though, that a look at that old serpent by the side of the road is enough to get you off on the wrong track. The only antedote is repentance.

Deception is a cancer. As it grows it works on the nervous system numbs one's feelings. Those things that before weighed on the conscience, now begin to feel good.

Talking about someone who is deceived, people often say, "Oh, down deep he knows better."

Wrong. This is what deception is all about. One loses his ability to "know better." I walked right up to the door of death, believing all was okay. Well did the Psalmist say, "For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm."

For a deceived person to again hear the voice of the Spirit, there must be a special act of grace. I believe that this almost always depends on the prayers of the saints.

Saints, don't ever give up praying for a deceived soul. One never knows when the Lord will mix the sweet smelling savour of such a prayer with His grace and give one more chance.

One more chance... Oh, for one more chance... ▲

An Update

by Jorge José da Silva

A Story of Love

[In Brazil News 136, Jorge José da Silva told the story of how they adopted three little children. I just received another letter, in which he tells how things are going. Notice at the end how he signed off this letter.]

I don't know exactly what to write about our adoptive children. On February 2 it was five months that they came to live with us. A lot of things have happened since then. It is my prayer that what I write will be led by God.

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Huguinho [little Hugo] was a great pouter. Any little thing that happened, he was pouting. Interestingly, even when he talked in his sleep, it was in an irritated voice. He was adept at telling the untruth, and to this day we are trying to rid him of this habit. I'm glad to say that our discipline has done wonders and today he is a different boy. We still must occasionally use the rod (as the Bible teaches), which is how we brought up our birth children, except that they didn't require as much discipline as he does. He has picked up a lot of good habits during these five months and we truly love him. He is an extrovert and enjoys excitement. We have a special love for this little boy. He has fattened out 10 kilos (22 pounds) since we got him.

Lorrane. When we got her she was a quiet little girl, or rather, that was the impression we had of her. She was so sweet, so happy, so hesitant. But all of a sudden, all that changed. She became very naughty! Very tricky! Very aggressive! Very untruthful!

It wasn't easy to know how to deal with this little girl with two personalities. We had to pray earnestly to know what to say, what to do and how to act. We went through a great struggle to become willing to do what the Bible teaches, to use the rod.

It has worked; it has melted us together, so that we truly are her parents and she truly is our daughter. We love her very much and can feel that she loves us as a daughter.

We can't let up on the discipline. I can leave this testimony that she has improved at least 70 percent. May God's name be praised!

Lóri Alessandra. So small! So helpless! So sweet! So beautiful! Lóri, Lóri, we love you so much! You have brought us so much happiness since coming into our home. When you first came, you didn't have a single tooth; now you have seven. We know, because every now and then you bite us hard enough to where it hurts.

She was so quiet, but today it's Mommy here and mommy there, Daddy here and Daddy there, Baby here and Baby there, plus a lot of other childish noises I don't even know how to write. Today she is so different from when we got her; so happy! She is such a lovely child and we love her so much!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have prayed for us in this great responsibility. I am sure that your prayers have helped us greatly in the many obstacles we have had to face.

Also I want to thank those who have sent us gifts for our new children. May the Lord reward you for what you have done. Not only have you helped us, but have left a beautiful witness with the social service people, who are closely following everything that is happening. They have told us, "It is God who is supplying your needs."

I also want to thank my birth children, who have had a very important part in this Story of Love!

[Signature]

Thinking Out Loud

A New World (Dis)Order?

Democracy is by no means a perfect form of government, yet it is probably the best the world has ever known. For democracy to function properly, the majority of the population must be of a sensible nature. Once the balance tips and frivolous or perverted minds become a majority at the polls, the light turns from amber to red.

The best definition of democracy goes to President Abraham Lincoln. In a speech at Gettysburg, Pa., in 1863, Lincoln declared that democracy is “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

The origin of democracy goes back over fifteen hundred years, to Athens, an important cultural city in ancient Greece. Because of the diminutive size of this city-state, the citizens of Greece would gather in a large courtyard, where they would discuss and vote on issues pertinent to their society. (I suspect these meetings sounded something like a bunch of Mennonites trying to decide what color to paint the church. Only maybe even worse.)

Since even the smallest countries today are too large for direct democracy, the people have only an indirect representation, through officials which they elect. When upright men are elected to public office, democracy functions well. When dishonest men and women are placed in office, democracy often becomes a farce.

We all know how democracy works.

Today we are witnessing something, that at first glance, would almost appear to be a return to the original concept of democracy, that of direct representation.

Protests are nothing new. They are very much a part of American history, beginning with the Boston Tea Party.

We can go back some two thousand years, when Paul denounced Demetrius’ despicable shrine-making industry. In a short time the entire guild was up in arms, and then “the whole city was filled with confusion.” For two hours straight the crowd cried out, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” Fortunately, the town clerk knew how to handle the situation and peace was restored.

Protests are becoming more and more commonplace. Anymore, just about anything under the sun is fodder for a protest. Not all protests are inherently wrong, indeed, when governments have failed in their duties, some have brought very positive results. In this sense, a protest bears a slight semblance to the old courtyard sessions in Athens, where citizens voiced their opinions.

Before the era of modern communication, a protest was usually a local matter. The circle continually enlarged, until it encompassed a region, a state, or even the entire nation. Finally, politically or ecologically orientated organizations, often radical, like Greenpeace, began to protest on a multinational level. As a general rule, these protests are taken seriously only by those of a kindred ideology.

The war with Iraq has given birth to a specter that will repeatedly return to haunt humanity—with a far greater destructiveness than many H-bombs.

The Internet and publicity are to a protest what hot air is to a thermal balloon. Protests are organized on the Internet and transmitted by television camera crews around the world. Thus in a matter of minutes it is possible for viewers to see hundreds of thousands of protesters in large cities in different countries and continents. The implicit message is that “the whole [world is] filled with confusion.” That is a powerful message, a message that strikes fear even in the staunchest hearts.

A close look at a protest is like looking into the vortex of a tornado. Let’s notice:

By whom are protests organized?

Protests, the kind we’ve been reading about lately, aren’t organized by the backbone of America, or any other country, for that matter. They are organized by malcontents, by men and women, by youth, who live in a world of fantasy, a world of extremes, of carnal love and bitter hate.

Protests are organized by those who have bent their knees to Michael Jackson and Madonna, by those who shout themselves hoarse at rock concerts. It would be interesting to know how many protests—if any—are organized without the aid of drugs.

To believe that men and women out of touch with reality will work in favor of the nation and of humanity stretches our imagination just a bit. Yet, that it is the place of the unholy conception of protests. And that is why they carry a far greater explosive force than many H-bombs.

At this point the media avidly plays into the protester’s hands by giving them the hot air they need to launch their balloon.

Not all balloons go very high or very far. In the case of the current war, the balloon is rising swiftly and traveling fast, obtaining exactly the results the “balloonists” hoped for. Worldwide, sensible citizens—not the down-and-out kind we described—are becoming sympathetic to the movement. This is creating a frightening anti-America sentiment.

The third development we are witnessing is adherence of sensible editors, columnists and political commentators to the movement.

Not all world leaders are made up of Reagan fiber. Too many, unfortunately, are guided by opinion polls. Before making a decision, their strategists consult the people (read as: voters) and bring the verdict: “If you push the issue, it will cost you votes.” That kind of leader will most certainly pay close—very close—attention to these protests.

Reduce that to its lowest common denominator and one has rule by protest. Agitators organize giant demonstrations. Sheer numbers give the impression that “everyone” believes like this. Sensible men, including journalists, adhere to the movement. Leaders are intimidated and fall in line.

Even though I have lived in Brazil for over 33 years, I continue to nurture a very warm spot for the US. I have no doubt but what it has played, and continues to play, a very important role in God’s plan for humanity. There are those who believe that America will be severely punished for its sins. My knowledge of prophecy is insufficient to accept or reject this thought.

Nevertheless, if rule by protest becomes the order of the day, I see very dark clouds on the horizon. This is the reason: Should America’s influence be corroded to where it can no longer be—as detractors say—the policeman of the world, what will the outcome be?

If the policemen were taken off of the nation's streets, how long would it be before law and order would be swallowed up by anarchy? And if the United States ceases to be respected as the international policeman, how long will it be before rogue nations begin terrorizing civilized nations?

If international rule by protest becomes a reality, then we will know we are living in perilous times. ▲

National Geographic

In our home, we have been getting National Geographic since July of 1965. With the exception of a few issues that have evaporated, the rest are stored in the bookcase on the right side of our fireplace.

National Geographic is a fabulous source of information. Yet, over the years, the board of directors has implemented a very definite change of editorial guidelines (which resulted in the resignation of one editor).

More and more the thrust of National Geographic is paleontology (The study of the forms of life existing in prehistoric or geologic times, as represented by the fossils of plants, animals, and other organisms. –AHD) and paleoanthropology (The study of humanlike creatures more primitive than Homo sapiens. –AHD).

A case in point is the April, 2003 issue, which shows a mother and infant child on the cover, with the caption: The Rise of Mammals – Mothers of Us All. Primatologist, Dr. Jane Goodall, has yet another extensive article on chimpanzees. Following is another article, also featuring Dr. Goodall. While she is a dedicated, very knowledgeable professional, one cannot but ask: Why so many articles on primates, not only in this issue, but in many others as well?

Articles on evolution can be ignored, but when they constantly pop up in a magazine, one must ask if it is time to consider not renewing when the subscription expires... And then, you know, since National Geographic believes so strongly that this earth is millions and millions of years old, maybe I can tell them to keep on sending their magazine and bill me two and a half million years from now. Why not...? ▲

Culture

Children's Stories

Children's stories occupy a very pleasant nook in our childhood memories.

I remember so well, when in the second or third grade, in a small rural one-room school, listening to my teacher read about Pa and Ma, Mary, Laura, Grace and Carrie, as they traveled across the prairies, built houses in Indian territory, and huddled around the fire as blizzards shook their cozy log cabin.

I remember the wide assortment of books in our school library, some short stories, others that took several days or more to read.

I also remember the public library with its long, floor to ceiling shelves, filled with children's books.

Finally, I remember the pleasant evening spent reading books that took me to other lands, into the past, and at time, into the future. All this is very much a part of my childhood.

Why do I write this? Several days ago I was looking for some children's stories, so I went to the largest bookstore in Rio Verde and looked around. I didn't find a single book, of the kind that I read when a boy (and even today). I went to a second bookstore, and then to a third. Nothing.

There is at least a partial explanation for this.

In pre-television days, many Brazilian children were illiterate. As we have mentioned before, there were virtually no rural schools. And contrary to what we see today, there were no children bussed to town. Many of the homes didn't have electricity, so except for the Abe Lincoln type, even those who could read, probably went to bed instead. So the demand for children's books must have been low. With the advent of television, there was no longer any need for children's books.

Then add one more factor to this. As so often happens in third-world or emerging nations, writers seldom make a decent living. Put all this together, and we come up with a severe literary drought of children's literature.

Reading has a profound influence on a child's thinking process. As I listened to the Little House books, I had to imagine thousands of scenes. Yes, William Garth's drawings helped, but most of the imagination was still left to me.

The child who learns to imagine constructively will have a tremendous advantage later in life. I read someplace what percentage of the patents are registered in the US. I don't remember the figure, but proportionally it is very high in relation to the rest of the world.

It's true that today children probably don't read as much as children read 40 or 50 years ago, yet what happened back then, when they had mountains of books at their disposal, resulted in an inventive people.

Nations and homes without children's books will never reach their full potential. This is unfortunate, because it is an irreparable loss. ▲

Information

Phone Numbers Etc.

The majority of you readers live in North America. This little paper is made up in South America—and by all appearances is taking about four months to reach you readers in NA. A hundred years ago, it would have taken four months, and probably considerably longer, for you to receive a letter from the state of Goiás, in Central Brazil, the home of the original American Colony.

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Even 33 years ago, when we first came to Rio Verde, our fastest communication was telegram. It was still the old woodpecker kind, that is pecked out in Morse Code. Talking about a headache...

To begin with, English was a foreign language, so the local telegraph operator would usually transpose, omit or add letters. Telegrams sent would go to Rio de Janeiro, where another operator would read the message and then retransmit it to its international destination. This international operator also had the privilege of further mixing up the message.

To send a message to N America and receive an answer would take at least four days, and up to a week. Then at times the answer would be so garbled as to make it almost unintelligible.

Today it is possible to call almost anyplace in the world, where there is phone service, in 30 seconds, or less. Without a doubt, it is a more efficient way to do business than 30 years ago.

Mail service between Rio Verde and N America is efficient. It takes approximately a week for a letter sent here to be delivered there, or vice-versa (Sunday I'm going to have to listen to some readers in Brazil who will in no uncertain terms inform me that they have lost scads of letters and packages in the mail...)

As you may have noticed, the little sub-header to this section is "Information." What is the proper way to address a letter you are sending to someone in Brazil? We'll suppose you're sending a letter to the literature center, which is the Publicadora Menonita.

Publicadora Menonita
C.P. 105
75901-970 Rio Verde – GO

Brazil

Now let's digest that.

After the name comes the post office Box number, 105.

Then comes the zip code—yes, it comes in front of the city, and not after the state, like in N America.

Rio Verde, of course, is the city and GO is the abbreviation of Goiás, the state.

At the end, toward the right, is the country.

You will notice that at no place do the letters S.A. appear. In Portuguese, S.A. means Sociedade Anônima, that is, "incorporated." Our phone company is Brasil Telecom S.A.

I understand that when N Americans put S.A. on an address, they are trying to aid postal officials who have no idea where Brazil is located, telling them that the mail pouch should be sent south to South America (and not to South Africa). The S.A. on an envelope is approximately equivalent to a sticker on an egg carton saying: "Contents of the eggs inside the shells."

To call here is really quite straightforward. Simply dial 011 55 + the number here in

Brazil. To call the literature center—Publicadora Menonita, dial: 011 55 64 613 9008.

Do remember, however, that when you are on daylight saving time and we are off, our clocks are two hours ahead of yours.

When you are off daylight saving time and we are off, we are four hours ahead of you.

Life on the Colony

Poultry & Hog Barns

From its inception, the Mennonite Colony in Rio Verde circled around agriculture. The majority of the brethren continue to have farming as their primary activity.

Over a period of years, some brethren began diversifying their farming, rotating fields with pastures and getting into cattle. For a few today, cattle are their chief source of income.

To raise cattle successfully today is just as much of a technical undertaking as farming. This is a personal opinion, but I believe that the margin of error in raising cattle successfully is less than in farming. Yet the rewards are worth it. Brazilians say that cattle are *dinheiro no banco*—money in the bank.

Once again the profile (and smell) of the Colony (read as: Monte Alegre Cong.) has changed as hog and poultry go into operation. (Hogs stink a lot worse than chickens, that's for sure.)

Today there are 10 sets of broiler barns on the Colony. Each set is made up of four barns with a 22-25 thousand bird capacity, or approximately 100 thousand birds per set. Another set is under construction, plus one set of hog barns.

Unlike farming and ranching, which normally is done by the family, with no hired help, most of the poultry projects are being run by hired help, with the active participation of family members.

This has two very positive benefits:

First of all, the men hired to take care of the barns are, in most cases, getting a very good wage—much higher than the local going wage. An agronomist told me that these men are making more than some professionals just out of college.

Secondly, suddenly these men are talking the same “language” as the “Colony folks.” When the conversation turns to chickens, they are able to contribute intelligently, and they are carefully heard out as they tell of what they have learned. This is good. Really good. It helps remove the gap between the owner and the worker. It makes them, if you like, more like brothers.

This & That

It's amazing how quickly happenings can turn into custom. It has become the custom here on Dec. 31 for the youth from the different congregations, and often the mission fields, to spend the day together. In the evening there is a youth rally, with singing and talks. Because of roads and our economical situation here, the youth from outlying areas have very little contact with the Colony youth. The meeting this year was at the Rio Verdinho Cong.

Jan. 1, we held our 8th General Annual Meeting in Brazil. The afternoon session is made up of committee reports and the discussion of items pertinent to our time and situation. In the evening there are several talks on a chosen topic. These meetings are well attended and well supported. I think everyone looks forward to them (except for the food committees).

Frank & Brenda Coblentz spent some time on the Patos and Acaraú missions, on the settlement in Mato Grosso, and then on the Colony.

Darryl & Lucélia Goossen sent some time here with her folks, Luiz & Maria Duarte.

On Jan. 5, Duane Miller, son of the late Enos & Clara Miller, married Luciene Rosa, daughter of Moacir & Sebastiana Rosa, at the Rio Verdinho Cong.

On Jan. 12, Monte Alegre's revivals began, with Richard Mininger and Rawlin Nightingale as the evangelists.

On Jan. 13, Nelson & Ruth Unruh, missionaries in Curitiba, had a boy, Silas Laren.

Fernando & Keila Rodrigues had a girl, Lanae Joy, on Jan. 15.

On Feb. 2, Joedson Bessa, son of José & Odercia Bessa, married Rosa Dirks, daughter of Leo & Mim Dirks, at the Monte Alegre Cong.

Barbara Coblentz and daughter Kari spent several weeks here. Barbara's folks are Bert & Ada Coblentz.

Barbra, daughter of Leo & Mim Dirks, is spending some time in the States.

Feb. 8-11, two brethren from the Conference School Committee, Min. Les Isaac and Dea. Leonard Goossen conducted a seminar on our church school system. To say the least, it was very good. I think that especially our boards and teachers, often feel themselves at a disadvantage because of our isolated situation. Not only were the boards and teachers inspired, but the brotherhood in general. It is apparent that our schools occupy the place in our communities that the plaza holds in the center of Latin American villages and cities.

Brandon Loewen and Andy Hiebert spent a short time on the Colony.

The Rio Verdinho Cong. had revival meetings. Ministers Greg Miller and Richard Koehn were the evangelists. These meetings were special because the two-man staff was doubled in size. At the end of the meetings bro. Mervin Loewen was elected to the ministry and bro. David Miller to the deaconry. This is going to be a real boost to the congregation, and a help to Min. Dean Mininger and Dea. Duane Holdeman, who had a heavy load to carry. Furthermore, it is a boost to the church in Brazil, with its acute shortage of ordained help.

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On Feb. 18, the Monte Alegre youth had a work day for Emma Burns, who continues on the home place where she has lived for nearly 34 years.

The Vilma Martins Borges case continues to make headlines. You will remember, she is the woman who kidnapped two newly-born children from their mothers and raised them as her own. Because of statutory limitations on her crimes, it is possible she will end up with little more than a slap on the wrist from the legal system. Her greatest punishment is no longer being able to be seen in public without being booed, or even being subjected to physical injury.

Our new president, Luiz Ignácio Lula da Silva, continues above our expectations. The exchange rate, the thermometer that quite accurately retracts foreign investors confidence in the Brazilian political and monetary situation, continues to drop (like fever, this is good). From a high of four reals to one dollar, we are now down to 3.22 reals to a dollar. He is being given a good chance of pushing through Congress a total revision of our Social Security system, which is threatening to bankrupt the country. If he can manage this, which our previous president, FHC, didn't manage, Lula will go down in history with high grades.