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Editorial

The Uniform

In his visit to Rio Verde some time ago, the President of Brazil, in an extemporaneous speech, told of his first job in a steel mill. He was issued a uniform and as he returned home after putting in his first day, “I didn’t walk,” he told his audience. “I floated home.”

After an impoverished childhood, that uniform identified him as worker, as a young man with earning power, a power that would help him have a better future than past.

When I was a boy, my dad would hire a young boy from our hometown to work for him during harvest and plowing. At the time of the Korean War, he joined the Armed Forces. I clearly remember when he came home for his first furlough before being shipped overseas. We went to his folks’ place to see him. There he was in crisp uniform, shiny buttons and shoes, smiling at us. To my young mind he was more than a common mortal.

We identify people by the uniform they wear: a policeman, a nurse, an airplane pilot, a John Deere salesman, a Federal Express deliveryman... We intimately associate the individual with the uniform.

Shell Oil Company had an informative ad on the back cover of a Newsweek magazine showing a Shell LNG carrier at sea. A photo shows a row of four gargantuan spheres in which the ship’s cargo of liquid natural gas is stored. Farther down is the ocean. In the corner of the bridge catwalk is a man with a shaved head, wearing a simple pullover and blue jeans. One imagines he could be the cook up for a breath of fresh air, or a deckhand. The explanation is in the text:

“Behind Sam Singh, *captain* of a Shell G Class carrier, sit 135,000 cubic meters of liquefied natural gas (LNG).” The final paragraph says, “And if people like *Sam* have anything to do with it... To find out more about our LNG business...”

There you have it. The very undistinguished looking man is actually the captain of the ship, and his company calls him Sam, not Mr. Singh, or Captain Singh.

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The fact that there has been nothing in the news about a Shell LNG carrier hitting the rocks, or exploding or sinking, would make one believe that “Sam” is a good captain. But let’s face it, if it was a passenger ship, I would feel more comfortable with “Captain Singh,” on the bridge in a pressed uniform with shiny brass buttons.

It is a disconcerting experience to go see the doctor and have him walk into his office wearing faded blue jeans, a wrinkled tee shirt that says, Vote for Bush (or Kerry) and a pair of tennis shoes. It takes a mental effort to keep our concept of his/her healing powers from dropping several notches.

A uniform should be worn with feeling, with dignity, with attachment. It should have an almost epidermic effect on the user.

We Holdemans do not have a rigid dress code; guidelines, yes, which can be resumed as modesty and simplicity. For the sisters, the head covering has been standardized and so far as I know, there is no other religious group that has adopted an identical mode. For the brethren, the beard is hardly a distinguishing feature, as bearded men in society are not unusual. Seen from this perspective, we Holdemans do not wear uniforms.

Yet, why is it that in a crowded airport, teaming with thousands of people, we are usually able to pick out a Holdeman? In the case of the sisters, the covering is the giveaway, but what makes this possible in the case of a brother?

Usually it is a direct look in the “stranger’s” face. If he is a brother, there will be a smile. Not a curt nod of the head, or a “stranger” smile, but a brotherly smile that says “How wonderful!”

Within five minutes—if schedules permit—they will know each other’s name (Are you related to...?), their congregations (Isn’t that where...is from?), where they grew up (Would you happen to know my cousin...who lives there?), their occupations...

By no means do Holdemans have a franchise on instant friendships. There are fraternities and orders with subtle characteristics or mannerisms that make for both recognition and fast friendships, similar to what we have just described. And yet totally different.

A uniform must be worn “with feeling, with dignity, with attachment.” When this isn’t the case, it is better to be out of uniform.

For years, about the only people to use a suit and tie in Rio Verde were lawyers—and that only when there was a hearing scheduled in which they would be representing a client. I distinctly remember seeing a lawyer, a somewhat slovenly looking fellow, walking into the courthouse with his “uniform.” Instead of wearing his suit coat and tie, like most lawyers, he held them in his lowered hand; both suit coat and tie were dragging on the floor. I pity the party who had him as legal counsel.

Soiled and unkempt uniforms disgrace not only the wearer, but also the corporation or business they represent.

In spite of no loud distinction (except, of course, for the head covering and possibly the beard), in most communities Holdemans are recognized as Holdemans, or Mennonites. They stand out just as surely as if they wore a uniform. And that being the case, we will—at least for the remainder of this article—assume that Holdemans wear identifying uniforms.

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The Holdemans' uniform is the way they practice their religion.

When I was a boy, my dad and a neighbor rented pasture bordering a state lake and camping ground, some ten miles from where we lived. At least once a week my dad and the neighbor would drive out to the pasture to check the windmill and the cattle. The neighbor's boys and I would pile into the back of the pickup and go along.

On one occasion our weekly trip to the pasture coincided with a Boy Scout jamboree by the lake. A number of pickups loaded with Boy Scouts in their magnificent uniforms passed our slower moving vehicle. Some of the boys, seeing us barefoot country bumpkins, would jeer and shout profanities.

My friends and I were both bewildered and disappointed. Deeply disappointed. We had always had an almost reverential awe for the fortunate boys who were able to wear neat uniforms, complete with a canteen and other items hanging on the belt. And yet, here were the boys we so envied, swearing at us. After that day a Boy Scout was no longer what a Boy Scout had been to us.

In all justice we must point out that not nearly all of the boys had such reprehensible behavior. But for us the few who did ruined the reputation for Boy Scouts in general.

On the other hand, there are those beautiful chance encounters with someone out of another setting in life—maybe another nationality. As we visit, we are not only impressed with the person, but get a good feeling toward his country and countrymen. A dream is born to someday become acquainted with the country and culture of our new friend.

People watch people. We watch people and people watch us. Just as we unconsciously classify an entire religion, nation or culture by the deportment of one individual, so we too are classified.

It would be inspirational to know how many members we have in the church today because of the faithful witness of one brother or sister. Possibly it was a chance encounter while sitting in an adjacent seat on a bus or train. They may tell about “the look on his/her face that radiated peace—something that I wanted so badly in my own life.”

Only the roll call on the Final Day will reveal how many souls will spend eternity in heaven because of someone who worthily was already robed in white here on earth.

Unhappily, that is only part of the story.

In real life, most people who wear a uniform do so only while on duty. There are those who anxiously await quitting time when they can change into civilian clothes. This is understandable.

In the religious world it isn't. There are far too many, some in the church, who do not wear their spiritual uniform with feeling, with dignity and with attachment. At times, like the lawyer, they drag their uniform in the dirt. Or they simply remove their uniform and put on civilian clothes and melt into the crowd.

I sincerely believe that in our midst there are many who wear their uniform with feeling, with dignity and with attachment...

Herman Frank. It is doubtful if anyone who met Herman Frank has ever forgotten him. That brother's uniform was always spotless, neatly pressed, buttons gleaming, boots shining like a mirror. He had no civilian clothes.

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When I was a boy he came to Lone Tree for a visit. After Sunday School, during the time normally devoted to general discussion, he was given the opportunity of singing with the children. He wasn't a great singer, but he could sing greatly. Those little choruses came alive when he sang them. I can still hear him singing *Isn't it grand to be a Christian, isn't it grand!*

Popular wisdom has it that once while a station attendant was filling his tank with gas, he looked the man in the eye and asked, "What are you doing with my friend?"

The attendant, having never seen Herman Frank before, didn't understand. "Your friend...? What do you mean?"

"My best friend. What are you doing with my best friend?"

With the stage thus set, Herman Frank was able to tell the attendant about Jesus, his best Friend.

I know another brother who wears the most beautiful uniform. I don't know if he can meet someone without making him his friend—and leaving a shining witness.

There are those who wear an immaculate uniform and leave a beautiful witness, and yet are too timid to say a word to someone with whom they aren't closely acquainted. Some 25 years ago here in Brazil, a young brother told me that something that was always an encouragement to him in his Christian life was a middle-aged sister known for her quietness and gentle smile. He said that each time he looked at her, he felt such a warmth.

A uniform worn with feeling, with dignity and attachment is a beautiful thing. Even more beautiful is a battalion of soldiers, all dressed in immaculate uniforms. As they smartly march to the roll of drums, a sense of courage and dedication is transmitted to lookers-on. It would be interesting to know how many young men, even children, have viewed such a parade and vowed to one day be a soldier.

Even more beautiful—ininitely more beautiful—is a battalion of...

Christian Soldiers, / Marching as to war, / With the cross of Jesus / Going on before.

The objective of this little article is not to point out how incongruous a soldier with a messy uniform looks in this battalion. Or worse, marching in civilian clothes. This is a terrible thing. Rather we want to listen to the words of the poet:

*Like a mighty army
Moves the Church of God;
Brothers we are treading
Where the saints have trod:
We are not divided,
All one body we,
One in hope and doctrine,
One in charity.
Onward then, ye people,
Join our happy throng,
Blend with ours your voices
In the triumph song:*

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*“Glory, praise and honor,
Unto Christ the King;”
This thro’ countless ages
Men and angels sing.*

*Onward, Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before.*

We are not obligated to be part of this army. We will never be drafted. We have the privilege of volunteering for service—and wearing the King’s uniform. May we wear it with feeling, dedication and attachment. ▲

Life in Brazil

God Opened the Way

[I hope that someday a study can be made of how many members of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite are adoptees, or their progeny. It is very possible that proportionally Brazil would be at the top of the ladder. In fact, if suddenly all those who have been adopted or fostered in our homes were suddenly removed, as well as their children, we would become a disaster area. In the following article, Stephen Kramer tells how he and his wife Dete from the Boa Esperança colony adopted a child in less than three weeks. For those who have spent months, or even years, and many thousands of dollars to become the legal parents of a child, the Kramer story is nothing less than a miracle. Comments in brackets are mine. cb]

Fortaleza CE, Thursday, June 10, 2004 — As the plane backs away from the terminal of the Fortaleza airport and the engines begin to hum, the baby in Dete’s arms settles down and goes to sleep. For the last several hours he has been restless and unhappy. I look at his peaceful little face and my thoughts run back through the events of the last few days, I think of the birth certificate carefully stored away in my carry-on, and the envelope with the adoption decree by which he legally became our son. It hardly seems possible that it is only 17 days since we got off the plane here on our way to Acaraú CE. My thoughts run back further to how it came about that we came here.

Why would a couple with five children want to adopt a sixth one? We’ve been asked that many times in the past two weeks, often enough that it makes one stop and ponder. We already have four daughters (the oldest adopted) and one son. When our son was born we knew we could not have any more biological children, but with the passing of time it felt like our family was not quite complete. Two years ago when our son was four we went to the *Conselho Tutelar* (Social Service office) in our local town of Sorriso and put in our name for adoption. When the social worker visited us in the course of making a home

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study, she asked us this question and at the time we didn't have a clear-cut answer, but when I recently had opportunity to read what she wrote I found it interesting that the underlying thought was the possibility of making a difference in a needy child's life.

When our home study was finished and approved they told us that now we would have to wait and pray. After nearly two years of praying and waiting, it felt like our time was about running out.

While teaching school at the Acaraú mission our oldest daughter Rosie met Karson's biological mother and became aware that she was pregnant and felt she could not care for her child and was looking for someone to adopt it. When Rosie first mentioned it to us, it seemed impossible but as time went by something began to tug at our hearts. At first we said we would take him if he is a boy. Soon the tug was enough that we said that if God would help us work out the legal end of it, we would take this child whether boy or girl.

As we began to look into the legal aspect of it we were told that while it was a pretty long shot, if everything clicked just right it could be made to work. We well knew that often in such things not everything clicks. Somehow we weren't losing a lot of sleep over all the possibilities of things going wrong; we thought it was faith but maybe to a point it was the bliss of ignorance.

Our Sorriso social worker explained that while our home-study was done on a state level, it was a document with a certain amount of national legal value. She said a court in another state would probably accept it. She made copies of the home-study and all related documents for us to take along. She told us that with an approved home-study it is possible for a court to process a full adoption in 2 weeks time if the judge felt to do so but that more likely they would give us temporary guardianship and let us bring the child home to finish the adoption process through our local court by court letters (*precatórias*). She was emphatic about the fact that it would depend a lot on the judge's willingness to help. We talked to the Acaraú social worker by phone and she too promised to do all she could to make it work but that it would depend entirely on the whim of the judge. In the end it was the judge's secretary, a modern mom with modern mom ideas of a woman's duty to push people around, who gave us the biggest run-around.

We would have liked to be in Acaraú when Karson was born, but since his due date was not very definite, making our plans was somewhat of a shot in the dark. Fortunately, Sergio & Katrina Alves, the missionaries in Acaraú, were willing and had mission board permission to keep him for us until we would get there. We stayed with them during our time in Acaraú and enjoyed being part of the mission routine there.

From our home in Mato Grosso to Acaraú is roughly 4,000 km (2,500 miles) by road. We were already planning a trip to visit relatives and friends in Goiás which is about a fourth of the way. When we checked into travel costs from Goiás to Acaraú, we found we could get a non-refundable, non-endorsable, use-it-or-loose-it, promotional air ticket for less than bus fare. The catch was that it was a limited amount of seats per flight promotion and to later change reservations would depend on availability of promotional seats with the possibility of needing to upgrade to full fare, the upgrade costing double the original fare. We made our reservations allowing for two weeks and

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one day in Acaraú hoping that would be enough and not knowing for sure what we would do if it wasn't.

Karson was born on Sunday, May 16. The next day Sergio & Katrina took him home and we left our home to travel to Goiás. The next Monday we left our children with uncles and aunts in Goiás and Dete and I flew to Fortaleza, Ceará and then bussed to Acaraú arriving at the mission house around midnight where we met Karson for the first time. The emotions of that meeting are hard to define. Here was an infant needing a home. Would we be capable of giving him the home he needs? Would we bond with him? Would we truly love him as our very own? We did not doubt God's leading up to that point but we had no certainty that two weeks later we could go home and take him along.

The next day, Tuesday, I began the emotional roller-coaster ride of trying to adopt a child. By the time it was done, I had walked many kilometers on Acaraú's cobbled streets. The social worker was out of town.; "Volte amanhã"—Come back tomorrow. Wednesday morning she was busy: "Volte à tarde"—Come back this afternoon. That afternoon she looked at our papers and seemed duly impressed, then she went with me to the courthouse and after a long wait the judge's modern mom secretary finally condescended to see what we wanted. She dutifully informed us that our Mato Grosso papers were of no value whatever in a Ceará court and that we would need to start from scratch. She said we would need to get a lawyer to file for adoption. She said that since Acaraú had only one court for everything they had a monumental backlog and an adoption would take a minimum of 6 months but that if we handled it right we might be able to get guardianship in 90 days or so. She did confirm what I thought I knew that the very first step was to have Karson's biological mother register him and get a birth certificate.

Since his mother was only 13 years old, the county registrar said we needed the mother and grandmother. So away we go to get them. Sergio took me to her aunt's compound where she lives with a married cousin's family. We talked to the aunt and when the grandma was mentioned she told us the girl's parents lived out at a fishing village some distance away and that she would sign for her. The county registrar, a white haired matriarch who works surrounded by children and grandchildren and under the stern gaze of father and mother looking down from their portraits on the wall, proceeded to give the girl a dressing down that was fearful to hear and finally sat down and hammered away at her ancient Remington manual and made a birth certificate. She accepted the girl's story that the baby's father was a man she does not know by name and registered Karson as father "unknown" and the aunt made her thumbprint by the X. As we drove them back to their compound the street led past the mission house. There seemed to be an unspoken question in the air so I asked her if she wanted to see him. She said she did so we stopped in and she stood stiffly just inside the door while Dete brought Karson out and showed him to her. At this point we were already very much in love with this lovable little bundle of humanity and we naturally wondered what we would do if she should decide she wanted him back. She showed no emotion of any kind but asked if we would let her take his picture before we leave.

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Thursday the social worker went with me to see the county attorney, Dr. Jorge [In some areas in Brazil, lawyers carry the honorary title of Dr.], who, she said, would do our legal work at the county's expense. We stood in a line of people, many of whom were each discussing their grievance with those next to them. When we finally got into his office he listened to us briefly and said he would do it but very politely told us he has more than he can handle and it would take him at least two weeks to get to it, and, "Next please."

Back outside I told the social worker that no way could we wait two weeks to get started and so where could I hire a private lawyer to do it. "Hey," she said, "if you're willing to pay for his services, Dr. Jorge himself will be interested in doing it *hoje*—today, you'll see." [This is not a bribe. It would be unreasonable to expect this lawyer to work overtime for nothing.] So back in we go without even waiting in line and she whispered to Dr. Jorge. He said, "Yes, yes, you just wait *cinco minutinhos*—five little minutes." So she said she had work to do and would we please excuse her.

In somewhat less than five minutes we were alone with him. He arose, locked the door and asked, "Now, what may I do for you?" He looked at my papers while I related what we had been told in Sorriso. He said our home study very definitely was valid and that if I was willing to pay him he would do it on his own time, setting up the case that very evening so I could file it the next morning. He was confident he could have guardianship papers through for us by the end of the following week. I asked him about his fee and he asked me to make him an offer. That put me in a bind because I had no idea how much would seem like too much or too little to him. In the end we agreed on a sum that would probably have seemed like a fortune to some of the local people, but to me seemed like a pittance by the time everything was said and done. Suffice to say that it was considerable less than a full fare upgrade on our airline tickets. He really put himself into it and was a Godsend, having a very workable relationship with the judge due to their involvement in the free legal work they do for the county. I took note of the fact that a majority of the cases judged in that court are child support and delinquent dad type of cases with legal expenses paid by the county.

Friday morning I picked up the papers at his office and went to the Court house to file our case. Modern Mom took my papers and then patiently informed me that all documents in a case must be entered into their "new" computer system and that the judge would only look at it after that was done. They (she and her covey of male assistants) would get busy and do it just as soon as they possibly could, which would be sometime in the next weeks. I tried to get in touch with Dr Jorge but he was out of town (he is an itinerant judge, working in several towns).

Most of the next week was spent trying to get them to do their thing. The judge would tell the lawyer that as soon as the secretaries put it on his desk he would get things going. The secretaries would say they were going to do it, but that is as far as things got. Finally, after many hours of trying to encourage them to get it done without being a nuisance, I finally made friends with one of the more sympathetic male assistants and he took it upon himself to do it.

The judge works in Acaraú on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, with hearings

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every Wednesday. That Thursday afternoon they finally put our case on his desk. How much he looked at it I don't know, but he left orders to summon the infant's biological mother and grandparents and request a case report from the social worker; then he left town. The secretaries said that in the normal course of things it would take the court officer several weeks to get the summons to the family, but maybe I could talk them into doing it immediately.

Away we went. The social worker went along so she could report on the biological family's situation. We picked up the mother where she lives and headed out to the coastal fishing village where her parents live. We found grandma at home in her tiny, low-walled mud daub house with clean swept door yard and several pre-school age children. Next door neighbors are great-grandma and miscellaneous aunts and cousins. Grandpa and the other men were to sea fishing with no definite return date. Our arrival created quite a stir and as the social worker and the mother went in to talk to grandma. A crowd gathered around our vehicle to gawk and ask some pretty pointed questions about what was going on. Soon we began to hear a considerable altercation inside the shack and as it moved out the door and around to our side the crowd vanished as if by magic. Grandma went with us fussing and fuming the whole while. Saying that when her husband comes home drunk and finds out what she is doing he would make it rough for her. At the courthouse she complained about having to get her thumb inky to help dispose of her grandson and then, oh no, Modern Mom informs them that this summons gives them 15 days to think it over and even though they registered nothing against the case, the court would take no action until after the 15-day period.

Friday I asked the lawyer if the judge was going to hold us to the 15 day deal. He said for guardianship he can if he wants to but does not have to if he feels not to. He thought that if I could get the social worker's report we still stood a good chance of getting guardianship in time to make our Tuesday afternoon flight. I tried to change my reservations for the next Friday, but it was all booked full. I finally got some for Saturday at full rates.

Over that weekend we were hoping it would be God's will to let things work for us to go home yet on Tuesday. Our brethren in Acaraú were by this time very much involved with our situation, praying for God to open doors as He saw fit. Somehow, in spite of all the ups and downs, we felt a confidence that God was in control. Somewhere about here Katrina mentioned the fact that she had several times heard us say that we have five children and are adopting Karson. She asked when we would begin to say we have six children. We told her we still have to live with the harsh reality that Karson could be taken from us.

The social worker said Saturday morning *cedo*—early, she would make the report. Saturday morning found her chasing after a contaminated water supply problem in the poorest section of town.

Monday afternoon I finally got the social worker's report and took it to the court house. Only then they told me I need a petition from the lawyer to include it in the case. The lawyer was out of town. I waited awhile for him at his hotel and finally left a message. Late evening he called and I went to the hotel to talk to him. The next

morning I picked him up early and went to his office and got the petition. He said the judge should be in by 8:00 o'clock and he thought he could still get our guardianship papers in time for us to make our flight.

Eight o'clock came and went and no judge. Suddenly I realized "this thing is not going to work." I went to the mission house and called the travel agent to cancel our reservations for that day. When I got back to the court house, the judge was in and the lawyer was just coming out of his rooms when I met him. I told him, "Dr Jorge, we've cancelled our reservations for today and now we're ready to wait it out. Once the judge makes up his mind we'll decide what to do." He looked me in the eye and said, "That's useful information." Then turned on his heel and went back to talk to the judge again. In a few minutes he was back out and said the judge agreed to grant us guardianship so we could go home but that we would need to come back at a later date for a hearing. He said that my being a foreigner complicated it a bit and made so they could not allow it to be done by court letters. The judge had also said if we did not come back he would issue a national arrest warrant.

I discussed it some with Dr Jorge, mentioning the fact that another trip to Acaraú would be a financial burden but if that was the only way we were willing to try to make it work. He told me I could come back in the afternoon to get the guardianship papers.

When I went back mid afternoon, Modern Mom asked me if I had talked to Dr Jorge again. She said, "Here is what has happened: the judge has issued your guardianship, but he has also decided to give you a full adoption immediately and has therefore appointed a hearing for 2:00 p.m. tomorrow and you are responsible to bring in the biological mother and grandmother. If you have them here at 2:00 o'clock tomorrow and they raise no objections, you will have your sentence and adoption decree by evening."

What a change of events! On one hand, the possibility of getting the finished adoption was obviously a God-send. On the other hand, signing the paper accepting responsibility for bringing grandma in again was one of the hardest things I did while in Acaraú.

I immediately went to find the social worker to tell her what was happening and plead with her to go with me to talk to grandma. We went, the social worker, her assistant, Sergio and I. Grandma received us with obvious distaste and at first said she would not go to court again. She said her husband had been home, drunk, and had really given her a rough time for having gone the first time. (Not that he objected to the adoption; he objected to grandma having something to do with it. In fact, we were told that IF we could catch him sober he himself would probably go and sign) Finally after much reasoning grandma agreed to go along the next day.

We prayed much during that night and forenoon, but even so I did not have much faith that grandma would cooperate. When it came time to fetch her I asked Sergio to go along because I didn't feel up to facing her by myself. Sure enough, when we got there it was obvious that she had no intentions of going anywhere. She absolutely refused to go along. She said she wished she could do this for her grandson, for whom she could do nothing else, but she had her own hide to look out for and she said, "If

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I go again, my husband, he will kill me.” No amount of reasoning would budge her. I finally told Sergio, “Let’s go.” He asked me what I was going to do. I told him I had faith that if this thing is of God then the lack of that grandma was not what is going to stop it.

The aunt who signed the birth certificate went along to court. The judge interviewed the mother in private first. Soon they ushered her out and called me in. As I stepped into the courtroom, the judge got up, came around the table and he warmly shook my hand. He said, “*Senhor* Kramer, when I took time to examine this case, I was deeply touched and felt moved to do all in my power to facilitate this thing for you. I felt it merited changing the posted court schedule to give you the prime slot of the day. I beg your pardon for making you postpone your trip home but I trust it will be worthwhile so you can take your son home with a finished adoption.” He said that he really admired seeing a family with children who are willing to adopt another one to give him a chance in life. He commented that the majority of adoption cases they see are childless couples who want to adopt a child to fill their own need for children, but with little thought for the child’s interests. He also commented that the spirit of Brazil’s adoption laws puts the needs and well-being of the child ahead of those of the parents, both biological and adoptive. When he dictated the results of our interview to his secretary, he mentioned the four sisters and one brother who are anxiously awaiting the arrival of their new brother, and it was obvious this meant a lot to him.

The judge did not so much as ask about the missing grandma. I presume he got what information he needed on that score from the mother. He told us the county attorney was out of town, but that he had consulted him by phone and that he was in accord. He would sign later.

By late afternoon we had our sentence and adoption decree. As per Brazilian custom, the judge had included Dete’s maiden name in Karson’s name even though we had not requested it. The rest of our children don’t have it but he does. So be it. When we said good bye to the biological mother after the hearing she looked into Karson’s face for a long moment with no outward sign of emotion whatever, then she patted Dete’s arm and said, “He’s your baby now,” and walked away. Our hearts go out to her; she’s only a girl, the age of our second daughter, and so much water under the bridge already.

The day before when things began to click I called our travel agent to see about reservations for Thursday. Believe it or not, she found openings on promotional seats and all we would need to pay was a small rebooking fee. This miracle came about through the fact that Thursday was a holiday. That meant that all paperwork had to be finished on Wednesday. Wednesday afternoon when we left the courthouse with the adoption decree we still faced one major hurdle before we could travel: the issuance of a new birth certificate with our names as legal parents.

That morning before the hearing I went to see the grandma registrar. I told her what our prospects were for the day and asked her if she could possibly do me the favor of issuing his birth certificate on Thursday morning even if it was a holiday. It turned out she is a devout catholic and it was very much against her principles to work on Corpus Christi day. She said she would much rather do it after hours today. So we agreed that once we had the adoption decree she would do it, even if it was late. So late-afternoon I happily

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marched into her office thinking we'd be all set by closing time, only to have grandma tell me with great finality, "Look son, I'm swamped with work; I've got all this here to do for these folks from out of town and at six o'clock I've got a meeting. There is no way that I can do your thing today, you can come back Friday." My disappointment must have been visible. My first thought was, "Don't tell me God got us those promotional reservations for tomorrow only to make us lose them here." About the next thought was, "You be nice to this grandma and there will be a way." I sighed a prayer and then gently reminded her that she had said she would do it late at night if necessary. I told her anytime between now and morning was fine with me. She softened immediately and said that if I could find two witnesses to come with me at 8:30 or so she would do it after her meeting.

So here we went: Sergio, brother Mundinho, Karson, Dete and I, off to the registrar's office at 8:30 that evening. We waited awhile with no sign of Grandma Registrar. We started visiting with some children on the street and soon found out grandma and her numerous progeny live in the high walled compound around and behind the low-roofed office. Someone ran to call her and soon she came leisurely up an ally picking supper from her teeth. She unlocked the back door and herded us into the stuffy windowless office (the street doors remained shut). She shuffled around among her mountains of record books and stuff and slowly, between visiting, reminiscing and pecking at her Remington, she cancelled the original birth certificate and made a new one. Sometime after 10:00 o'clock the incongruity of it all struck me so forcefully that I had all I could do to keep from laughing aloud. There she sat on her ancient handmade rung chair with it's woven rope seat, her feet dangling several inches above her pink thongs on the cracked cement floor, her white afro making a halo around her tranquil Aunt Jemima face, her Remington on the counter at chest level, by turns hunting and pecking and then hammering furiously on the keys. At one point she stopped, scratched her wool reflectively, pointed her finger at Mundinho and said, "I remember when you were born, son." Then got back to business.

When she was done, she pronounced a blessing upon us. She said, "This little boy will be blessed and be a blessing. May God bless you all." Then we filed out the alley and into the night clutching a real McCoy, stamped, sealed and registered birth certificate for OUR son Karson Clyde Lacerda Kramer.

The next morning we said good-bye and took the early bus for Fortaleza. At the airport we happily paid the re-booking fee, exchanged our tickets and settled down to enjoy an almost empty airport. Apparently not many Brazilians travel on Corpus Christi day. For lunch at the food court we checked out the Chinese restaurant then settled for the Brazilian food next door. The waitress from the Chinese restaurant brought us a baggage cart with an infant seat for Karson. How thoughtful of her. All through that interminable day people were attracted by the fact that we were traveling with an infant and would ask his age. When we told them it was 25 days they wanted to hear the story. When we told them, without fail they expressed their appreciation and admiration for what we were doing, even more so when they would ask if he is our first and we told them he's number six. ▲

[The return home: to be continued in the next issue].

A Story from Mozambique

A Time to Die

[Janete, Mrs. Edinei Alves, faxed me this story from Mozambique, where she and her family are stationed. Taken from the book Coisas de Tete, it all sounds a bit far out, but then who knows... How about some of you readers checking out your local cemeteries and sending me your findings. I will try and capture the writer's Mozambican style in the translation.]

I have been, going on two years, pondering a matter that someone told me and proved with facts right in the M'Pádwe cemetery here in the city of Tete.

I didn't believe, until years went by and I was able to verify that it is the truth, I don't know if scientifically, that I don't know.

It is that my friend asked me to verify the cemeteries about a small big detail [*um pequeno grande detalhe*] on the signs that have the date of birth and death of the departed one.

The listener [reader] is probably thinking that I will, once again, write about the bad habit and mistake of writing something more or less like this on the signs: "Here lies...or here lies, so and so." No way!!! What happened is that I ended up seeing with these two eyes that I still have and I see well with them, the following strange fact. Most of the deceased that lie in the cemeteries died in the three months before the month of their birth or in the three months following.

I explain it more or less like this for the understanding of all of my loving and beloved citizens: In life, human beings have six months of normal life and another six of tribulation/agitation and much meditation.

That means that if a citizen was born in January, he will probably pass away between October and April and consequently he can have a life without death between May and September, that is, a natural death, especially as a result of sickness, because nature does not fit into this thing a death brought on by murder, witchcraft or accident.

So, after I saw this in the municipal cemetery of the city, I didn't feel satisfied nor resigned. It increased and sharpened my curiosity as a writer. I went to the Muslim cemetery and ended up seeing and verifying the same thing. It still didn't give me much to write about or tell because I believed it still wasn't everything I knew or wanted to know. I was in Maputo twice, I went to Lhanguene and confirmed what I had seen in and verified in Tete. As I had a chance to spend a number of days in South Africa, I didn't waste time and there I saw and confirmed that which I had seen and verified in Mozambique. I was able to see and have this sad, but real confirmation of the thing of six months of life and of death.

Most of the people had died in the space of six months of the month of their birth, that is, three before and three after.

How can this be explained? I don't know because I still haven't had occasion to broach a conversation with some, any, anthropologist or sociologist or something similar to someone learned in the science of the things of nature, neither did I even consult, as I like, a *nyabhezzi* (witch doctor) to know if he knows the why of this.

To have the certainty of what I know, suffice it for each one to go to the cemeteries and read what the signs say and see if it is the truth. Most of the dead ones died [within] three months before or after the month of their birth. Many of those who died a natural death, it was within this space.

Because this isn't scientific, it is possible and very probable that one case or another is not within these accounting of natural things, but there remains here a situation worthy of the reflection of all my friends and loving hearers to consider that it is a possibility to be studied.

And so now, be assured that each one of us, and it doesn't matter what our age is, we have six months of a good life and another six of uncertain tribulation. ▲

A Letter from Brazil

The Circus Ballerina

[Valéria is a itinerant circus ballerina who has become interested in the church. Yet, she faces a formidable mountain range which will need to be crossed.

An interesting sidelight is that a young boy living with us and helping in the chicken barns saw Valéria. Later he said, "I've seen that lady before." We asked him, "Was it in a circus?" "Yes," he exclaimed, "She is the ballerina."

Listen to her story...]

My name is Edanny Alves Torres, but everyone calls me Valéria. I am 33 years old and have a daughter who is 10 years old.

This story begin during the time I lived in Imperatriz, in the state of Maranhão. That is the year the circus came to town. I was working in a supermarket and finishing high school.

One Sunday afternoon I went to the circus, and that is where I learned to know a young man who would become my daughter's father. We began going together and three months later I became part of the circus. For the last 13 years I have seen almost all of Brazil. During this time I went to different churches.

In 2000, the circus came to Rio Verde. One afternoon as I was walking down a street, I saw a woman with a very decent flowered dress and a covering on her head. That really caught my attention. I ran after her and asked her what her name was. I found out she was Glenda (Mrs. Mark Loewen) and that she belonged to the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. She gave me a tract. The circus moved on and I left town without visiting the church.

From that day on my soul didn't find rest. Even though I wasn't acquainted with the church, I couldn't get it out of my mind.

Five years later the circus came to Goiânia, which is 220 km from Rio Verde. I was going to another church one evening when I saw a woman with a decent dress and a covering on her head. Then I remembered Glenda. I introduced myself and asked which church she was from. She said she belonged to the Church of God in

Christ, Mennonite. I thought to myself: God's hand is in this, for this can hardly be a coincidence.

Two months later my daughter, Lorena, and I drove to Rio Verde in our car, where I became acquainted with God's church.

Thanks to God, I felt something new in my life; a deep desire to serve God. Many things that I used to do, I no longer have any desire to do. I have never before seen a church in which the brethren are brethren indeed. Their teachings are taken from the Holy Bible. Today I can say that I have found the right way.

Unfortunately, I am not yet a member of this church. I never married the man I am living with and I don't know what the church will say about this. But as time goes on, things keep changing and I feel a desire to live only for God. In the circus I am a ballerina, but I no longer have a desire to dance.

I went to the Annual Meeting of the Church of God in Rio Verde. I left there overflowing with happiness—a happiness that isn't of this world.

I ask the brethren who read my story to not forget me in your prayers, for I am beginning to walk on the narrow way and need spiritual help. The only thing my heart now desires is to serve God.

I am seeing many obstacles in the way. The man I live with refuses to let me become a member of the church, but the Spirit keeps calling me to walk on the narrow way. I am praying and asking God to give me direction, because I don't know what to do. What I do know, though, is that I want to strive for the faith and for my salvation, for I don't know when I'll be called to eternity. If I'm not ready, I will have to pay the price during all eternity.

I ask all the brethren to pray for me. ▲

Book Review

I have in my hands a little book called *Gold Dust*, that was printed on February 10, 1880. It was translated out of the French, so we can only guess as to when this "collection of Golden counsels for the santification of daily life" was actually compiled. It is very good, and since it has no copyright, I hope to reset the type and make a new printing. Notice article XXVI:

Let it rest! Ah! how many hearts on the brink of anxiety and disquietude by this simple sentence have been made calm and happy!

Some proceeding has wounded us by its want of tact; *let it rest*; no one will think of it again.

A harsh or unjust sentence irritates us; *let it rest*; whoever may have given vent to it will be pleased to see it is forgotten.

A painful scandal is about to estrange us from an old friend; *let it rest*, and thus preserve our charity and peace of mind.

A suspicious look is on the point of cooling our affection; *let it rest*, and our look of trust will restore confidence... ▲