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Editorial

When Failure and Defeat Aren't the End

When telling the story of Moses, we leave pretty much of an 80 year gap, between his early nautical experience on the Nile River and the burning bush in the desert. Yes, we tell that he lived in a palace for 40 years, but we really have no details of that period. We mention that sometime around his fortieth birthday he killed an Egyptian and fled to the desert. About all we can say about this period is that he took care of his dad-in-law's sheep. It is at the incident of the burning bush that we again go into storytelling mode.

TIME MAGAZINE would have been delighted with the information. The cover would have carried a bold photo of Moses and announced: PRINCE MOSES REBELS AGAINST PHARAOH AND FLEES. We, on the other hand, tend to underplay the significance of this happening. For Moses to let his emotions overrule was certainly out of keeping with his character and training.

Without a doubt Pharaoh was aware that Moses was his adopted grandson. We don't know what kind of relationship existed between them. It's possible he looked on this grafted grandson with both curiosity and affection. No matter how close they may have been, Moses wasn't naïve and knew perfectly well that killing an Egyptian in defense of an Israelite would be seen as an act of treason by his granddad. He fled.

Moses had a number of options after fleeing.

He could have simply wilted away.

He could have become an embittered man and attempted to justify his act to anyone willing to listen.

With the vast knowledge accumulated in court, as well as his military training, he could have gone to Egypt's enemies and tried to organize an invasion army to release his countrymen from their bondage.

It is said that Moses spent the first 40 years of life learning to be someone and the next 40 years learning he was nobody. This sounds rather clever, but probably is an

oversimplification of the situation. Yes, Moses did flee to the desert where he was taken in by a couple, one of whose daughters he would eventually marry.

When Moses became a shepherd taking care of his dad-in-law's sheep, he doubtlessly spent days and weeks in the solitude of the desert. We don't believe that during those years he forgot the plight of his people in Egypt, nor do we believe that he tried to scrub his mind of all knowledge acquired with his adoptive family and country. Rather, this was a time of profound reflection during which the Lord doubtlessly spoke to him many times. What we can very safely assume is that in the desert he permitted Heaven to infuse him with patience, humility and meekness. This in turn gave him a solid footing to sort out what he learned in Pharaoh's court. His outstanding organizational skills, the ability to conduct over a million souls in an inhospitable environment in which survival depended on a daily subsidy of celestial manna was not the sole result of 40 years in court, nor of 40 years in the desert. Moses was a great leader because he understood that failure and defeat need not be the end, that failure can be the beginning.

* * *

By profession, Greg Mortenson is an emergency room trauma nurse. By passion he is a mountaineer. At age 11 he summated 19,340 foot Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest peak in Africa, where he grew up with his missionary parents. As a young man, after moving to California, he became familiar with Yosemite's many sheer granite faces. He spent vacations in Pakistan assisting foreign climbers in establishing high level camps in K2's rarified air.

K2, we insert here, is the second highest mountain in the world, considered by many climbers as more difficult to ascend than Everest. Known as the "Savage Peak" at 28,267 feet, this Pakistani peak has snuffed out the lives of many climbers. Mildly, K2 is not for the weak.

At 35, Mortenson decided to make his own ascent of the mountain he dubbed "the biggest and baddest summit on Earth." His team was made up of seasoned climbers, including leaders, Dan Mazur and Jonathan Pratt, together with teammate Etienne Fine, an arrogant Frenchman accustomed to taking chances by traveling "fast and light with the absolute minimum of gear."

After over 70 days of strenuous work transporting gear and supplies to the base camp from which the final assault would begin, Mortenson and fellow climber Darsney were exhausted after 90 hours with only a minimum of sleep as they completed the final portage. Just before settling down for a well-deserved rest, they noticed a blinking lantern light from higher up on the mountain. That could mean only one thing: an emergency.

Hours before, Mazur and Pratt had proceeded on their own. Shortly thereafter Fine proceeded on his own. The effort was so great that upon reaching his fellow climbers, he was struck with pulmonary edema, an altitude-induced flooding of the lungs that kills unless the victim is quickly taken to a lower elevation. This was not the first time Fine had to be rescued after a foolhardy dash that nearly ended in disaster.

Mortenson and Darsney were so exhausted they knew there was no way they could

attempt a rescue mission. They called for volunteers from the other five teams at the base camp, but when there were no takers, they decided to sleep for several hours and then make an attempt.

In the meantime, Mazur and Pratt began the descent with Fine. At great personal danger they would take turns clipping themselves to him and rappelling down the steepest pitches. After a brief rest, Mortenson and Darsney began their climb. When they met with the three descending climbers, Fine was lapsing in and out of consciousness, now also suffering from altitude-induced cerebral edema. For hours the four rescuers, now nearing collapse themselves, struggled to lower Fine to the advance base camp.

Upon arriving, the Pakistani military was contacted and a high altitude helicopter rescue requested. They were told the weather wouldn't permit and that they should bring the victim to a lower elevation. Nice was strapped into a sleeping bag and the four rescuers began the arduous descent, dragging or carrying him the best they could. At times they were so exhausted they could only crawl as they slowly inched downward.

When the lower base camp was finally reached, the rescue helicopter flew in and took Fine to a medical facility. Ignoring the feast prepared for them by climbers, the four men slept for 48 hours.

When Mortenson awoke, hardly able to walk, he knew that his quest for K2 was over. His eyes stung with tears, so great was his disappointment. Years of preparation, practically since childhood, had come to naught because of the unsound judgment of one man.

Mortenson and Darsney decided they would return to civilization. With a quicker stride, Darsney soon left Mortenson behind. Thirty five pounds lighter and feeling 35 years older than at the beginning of the expedition, Mortenson would trek the 50 miles to Askole alone. He would travel light, taking only a lightweight Pakistani wool army blanket, an empty water bottle and one protein bar. Everything else, including a high altitude, down sleeping bag, a tent, a stove…, was with his porter with whom he was to rendezvous.

Night was approaching and it soon became evident he had lost the trail. The altitude induced stupor brought on by the rarified air made even simple concentration difficult. He knew that temperatures would plummet well below freezing. If his porter didn't find him soon, he would have to spend the night rolled up in his thin army blanket.

The porter didn't find him and during the night the wind came up, dropping the chill factor alarmingly and making sleep next to impossible. At daybreak, Mortenson was aroused from his fitful slumber by a feeling of suffocation. He soon realized that condensation from his breath had coated his mouth and nose with a layer of ice.

Once he had broken free from the ice and was on his feet again, Mortenson felt his brain was functioning better than the day before. He decided that if he would retrace his steps, surely he would come upon the trail he had missed. As he retraced his steps, he was startled to realize he was hearing the words to a childhood chorus. Yesu ni refiki Yangu, Ah kayee Mbinguni. (What a Friend we have in Jesus, / He lives in heaven) He began singing in Swahili. Then the incongruity of the situation hit him. Here he was, an

American, raised in Tanzania, lost in Pakistan, singing a German hymn in Swahili. The song transported him to his childhood home, and now, instead of the bitter cold, he felt a comforting warmth.

After walking several hours he spotted the figure of a man, possibly a mile away. Mortenson began shouting, hoping his voice would carry in the rarified mountain air. The man was moving toward him. Soon his porter, dwarfed by the enormous backpack he carried, was giving him a breathtaking bear hug. During the next days they traveled together. In the afternoon the porter would hurry ahead and have supper prepared for when Mortenson arrived in the make shift camp.

Then on the afternoon of the seventh day, a mere eight miles from Askole, engrossed by the beautiful scenery, Mortenson lost his way for the second time. Failing to see a fork in the road that would take him to a zamba, a swinging bridge made of yak hair braided and lashed together that crossed a rushing river between two boulders, he began following the south bank of the river. Soon he found himself in a peach orchard where women and children were gathering fruit. The women seemed frightened, but the children were enchanted by this huge foreigner. As they surrounded him, Mortenson realized he was hardly presentable. His bulky frame was filthy after three months without a shower, his unkempt hair and beard long and shaggy. The children didn't even notice as they took turns holding his hands.

Mortenson continued walking and by the time he reached a village, which he assumed was Askole, he had some 50 children trailing him. The dignified, bearded, gray-haired man who greeted him at the village entrance was not his porter, as he had expected, but Haji Ali, the nurmadhar (chief) of Korphe, a man who was to have a profound influence on Mortenson's life.

Mortenson was invited into Haji Ali's dwelling and offered a piece of ibex jerky, that he describes as "the single most challenging mouthful" of his life. Then came the first of many cups of tea for which the Pakistanis are famous, in this case, buttered tea.

The ceremonial reception over, Haji Ali leaned forward and asked in Balti, "Chezzaley?", roughly, "What's going on?"

In crude Balti and much gesticulating, Mortenson related the happenings of the last days and added that now that he was in Askole, he wanted to hire a jeep to take him to Skardu, the provincial capital where he would reunite with Mouzafer, his porter. He was taken aback when informed that he was not in Askole, but the tiny village of Korphe.

Not to worry. Haji Ali would send a messenger to Skardu to inform Mouzafer about his whereabouts. As it turned out, Mouzafer was a famous porter, known by all.

Mortenson spent that night sleeping on the floor of the dwelling surrounded by the rest of the family. As he says, he soon added his snores to theirs. This was the first night he spent indoors for over three months. Dead tired, he didn't awaken until the next morning when sunlight was penetrating the room through the square hole in the ceiling. Noticing he was awake, Haji Ali's wife brought him fresh-baked chapatti and sweet tea. (Only later did he discover what a rarity sugar was in this remote village and the sacrifice being made so he could have sweet tea.) He says that Sakina had the kindest face he had ever seen.

Mouzafer soon showed up, bringing with him Mortenson's 90 pound backpack. With Mouzafer's help, Mortenson was reunited with Darsney and they made their way to Askole. Strangely, the luxury of sleeping in a motel and eating rounded-out meals did not bring him the fulfillment he had expected. In his heart he felt a strong tug to return to Korphe and Haji Ali.

Mortenson returned to Korphe and settled into the Haji Ali household, drinking their tea, eating their food, sleeping on their floor together with the rest of the family members. As he took walks, he began to realize how emaciated his own body was. So did his hosts and they did everything they could to restore his health.

As he observed the unhurried, unobtrusive life of the villagers, he began to believe he had stumbled upon a kind of Shangri-La. But as he became better acquainted with the villagers and their daily routine, he made a somber discovery. One out of every three children born in the village died soon after birth. In every family, a goiter or cataracts afflicted at least one member. Except for herbal treatments, health care was non-existent; no doctors, no nurses, no medical facilities. The nearest doctor was a week's walk away in Skardu.

Mortenson felt a deep gratitude to the people of Korphe, and especially to Haji Ali's family, for the undeserved kindness they were showing him and began looking for ways to repay them. He began with his heavy backpack, presenting his heavy Helly Hansen jacket to Haji Ali. Other items were distributed among the villagers. Of greatest value, however, were his medical supplies which he began using to treat ill and injured Korphe and surrounding area. He drained infections, set bones, and did everything else he could with limited resources. Soon he was known as "Dr. Gregg," a name that followed him through all of northern Pakistan. Efforts to explain he was a nurse and not a doctor fell on deaf ears. So, Dr. Gregg he was, not only to villagers, but also to high level government officials.

One night, lying by the hearth before retiring, Mortenson told Haji Ali he would like to visit the village school. He sensed a certain reluctance in his host, but after some insistence he agreed to show him the school the following day.

What Mortenson learned the next morning defied even the most far out scenarios he could have imagined. Haji Ali led him up a narrow mountain path to a ledge 800 feet above the plain with a breathtaking view of the surrounding area. What caught Mortenson's attention was not the scenery, but the sight of 82 children—78 boys and four girls—kneeling on the rock ledge in freezing weather. Slowly his mind began to absorb what he was seeing. Here was a school without desks, without books, without a teacher—and indeed, without a school.

Barely unable to control his emotions, Mortenson watched as the students arose, stood at rigid attention and sang the national Pakistani anthem, their breath steaming: Blessed be the sacred land, / Happy be the bounteous realm, / Symbol of high resolve, / Land of Pakistan.

Haji Ali explained that the village was unable to afford a full-time teacher that charged the equivalent of one US dollar per day, so they divided the teacher with a neighboring village. Three days a week the teacher came to Korphe and the rest of the

week he taught in Munjung. On this particular day the teacher was in the neighboring village.

Class began with the students copying multiplications tables. A few of the more "well-to-do" students wrote on slates with a mixture of mud and water. The rest scratched their math lesson onto the dust covering the ledge with sticks.

Mortenson made a decision. He was going to help these children get a schooling. But how? He had barely enough money to pay a jeep to take him to the airport and then buy a return ticket to the US. He himself was surprised when he found himself putting his hand on Haji Ali's shoulder and promising, "I am going to build you a school. I promise."

Mortenson returned to the US and got work at the UCSF Medical Center emergency room. He spent his free time at a manual typewriter writing letter to news anchors celebrities and public figures explaining the plight of thousands of Pakistani children who were denied the privilege of having an education. With his large fingers he laboriously typed out the letters one by one. His goal was to write 500 letters.

After painstakingly writing 300 letters, he was made aware that a computer would take most of the tediousness out of his task. He quickly realized that with cut and paste, he could have produced the 300 letters in a single day. He surpassed his goal and soon he had mailed 580 letters. He saved money for his project, he began sleeping in the back seat of his car to avoid renting an apartment. Breakfast was a 99 cent special and dinner a three dollar burrito, with no lunch. Frequently police roused him in the middle of the night and he had to drive to a new location to sleep until dawn.

Once again Mortenson seemed headed for failure. Of the 580 letters sent, he received one response, this from Tom Brokaw, an alumnus from the University of South Dakota, a check for one hundred dollars. His mother, a schoolteacher, launched a "Pennies for Pakistan" drive and collected 62,345 pennies, sent to him as a check for $623.45. A school estimated to cost ten thousand dollars can hardly be built with $723.45.

When it seemed everything was lost, there appeared a new ray of hope. Tom Vaughan, a physician and climber, informed Mortenson that Dr. Jean Hoerni, an eccentric, irascible scientist with a fortune of over 300 million dollars, who also climbed mountains, was interested in his project. This fortuitous encounter turned out to be the launching pad for his Pakistani dream.

His first contact with Hoerni, by telephone, could hardly be described as cordial. The conversation began like this:

"This is Greg Mortenson. Tom Vaughan gave me your phone number and I am calling…"

"I know what you're after. Tell me, if I give you fund [sic]for your school, you're not going to […] to some beach in Mexico, smoke dope, and […] your girlfriend, are you?"

"I…"

"What do you say?"

"No sir, of course not. I just want to educate children. In the Karokoram. They really need our help. They have it pretty rough there."

"I know. I am there in '74. On my way to Baltoro."

"Were you there for a trek, or with a…?"

"So. Exactly what will your school cost?"

"I met with an architect and contractor in Skardu, and priced out all the materials. I want it to have five rooms, four for classes, and one common room for…"

"A number."

"Twelve thousand dollars, but whatever you would like to contribute toward…"

"Is that all? You're not […] me? You can really build your school for twelve grand?"

"Yes sir."

"What's your address?"

Over a period of years, from this inauspicious beginning, over a million dollars would be forthcoming for schools in Pakistan, plus a very close friendship. It was Mortenson who personally took care of him during the waning months of his life.

While waiting for Hoerni's check to clear, Mortenson began disposing of all his earthly goods—he did not include his travel and personal expenses in the amount given—including his climbing gear that for many years he considered to be his life. Finally he took his gas-guzzling car, that was his living quarters for a year, to a used car lot and walked away with an additional five hundred dollars.

Mortenson's cut rate ticket meant he had to spend 56 hours en route. When he arrived in Rawalpindi, the hotel manager let him have his "cheapliest" room for two US dollars a day. At this point he was facing a greater challenge than the ascension of K2, or any other mountain in the world. Here he was, an unknown figure in a foreign country, with only a rudimentary knowledge of the language and customs. He was perfectly aware of how vulnerable he was. "Every rupee counted now. Every wasted dollar stole bricks or books from the school." Yet it was exactly here, where the possibility of failure was much greater than that of success, that Mortenson showed a quality that was eventually to translate into many schools: He sought out men whom he could trust and then depended on their judgment. Yes, he made mistakes, but always managed to rebound before irreparable damage was done.

There was nothing easy about the task Mortenson set out to accomplish. How he finally managed to come up with all the necessary material for his first school is a story in itself, which we will not tell here. When he traveled to Korphe and triumphantly told Haji Ali that he would now start hauling in supplies to begin construction of the village school, he faced yet another great disappointment. Impossible, he was told. No way could all the material be ferried over the gorge separating the village from the main road in the little hand operated cable box. First, he was told, a bridge would have to be built.

Mortenson had to return to the US and raise more money. Reluctant to contact his benefactor, he finally realized there was no other solution. He was surprised at the old man's reaction. "You know, some of my ex-wives could spend more fund than that in a weekend." He handed Mortenson an additional ten thousand dollars.

The bridge was built and then the school—because he failed to scale K2, because he wrote 580 letters and got only one response, because…

Returning to the US, Mortenson was invited to an American Himalayan Association event at which Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to reach the top of Mount Everest, was to give a speech. Also present was Tara, the daughter of Barry Bishop, a member of the first American expedition to scale Everest. When by chance, Mortenson met Tara, there was instant chemistry. She was a graduate student finishing her doctorate at the California School of Professional Psychology. She and Mortenson spent the next several days together. On the fourth day, a Sunday, she impulsively asked, "When are we getting married?" Without missing a beat, he replied, "Tuesday." And so, six days after having met, they were married. Their love was not a brush fire. Today, with children, they are closer than ever, in spite of the extended periods he spends abroad and in his grueling routine in the US giving speeches all over the nation.

By now Hoerni was more excited about Mortenson's project than about his own scientific research. Funds were available for more schools.

In a sense, this is where Mortenson's story really begins. As of 2009, his foundation has built 131 schools and given 58,000 children in remote villages the privilege of going to school. More impressive is the fact that 44,000 of these students were girls, who hitherto were denied an education. Mortenson has come under gunfire from rivaling tribes and in 1996 was kidnapped and held hostage for eight days by the Afghan Taliban.

We suggest reading *Three Cups of Tea*—over 3.5 million copies sold in 39 countries—and *Stones into Schools*. His books are considered mandatory reading for ranking officials in the State Department. Just a few on the Who's Who list of supporters include: Fareed Zakaria, International Editor of Newsweek; General David Petraeus, CENTCOM commander; General Stanley McChrystal, ISAF/U.S. commander in Afghanistan; Senator John Kerry, President Bill Clinton, First Lady Laura Bush, Barbara and George Bush Sr., Secretary of State Colin Powell, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Conner, Tom and Meredith Brokaw, Angelina Jody, Khaled Hosseini, author of The Kite Runner and A Thousand Splendid Suns. Of Tara he says, "Tara, my wife—dear friend, companion, confidante, mother of our children, and the love of my life whom I married six days after meeting […] in 1995." Greg Mortenson has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Life *is* a respecter of persons, kinder to some than to others. There are those rare souls who make their way through life on a ski lift. They rise steadily, and it seems almost effortlessly, to reach the summit of their dreams. Yes, rare souls they are. The rest of us mortals miss the ski lift and must clumsily pursue our dreams on snowshoes.

Snowshoes need not thwart our happiness nor bar us from reaching our goals. Failure, and the fear of failure, are the two great villains that have relegated so many worthwhile and noble undertakings to the ossuary of defeat and despair. History shows us that very few, if any, great leaders and achievers have hitched a ride on a ski lift. Some have accumulated a pile of failures and defeats that rival K2 in height. But they didn't give up. They stood up. That is the secret. ▲

A Story

A Misunderstanding

When we moved to Brazil in 69, most of our area was made up of *campo* (rolling grassland with but a few scrub trees), *cerrado* (land covered with small trees), and *cultura* (heavy woods covered with towering trees and a dense underbrush).

To get the *campo* into production, the farmers would begin working up the land with a heavy offset disk, running over the few trees that existed. The *cerrado* was usually heavy enough that it needed to be cleared by tractor and blade, or even heavier equipment. The *cultura*, that serves as a backdrop for this story, was usually so dense and on such steep hillsides that even heavy equipment wasn't practical. In this case, men would go in with axes and *foices*(a type of curved machete attached to a 6 ft. handle) and clear the land. Very commonly the *cultura* would come in small five to 25 acre plots.

To clear *cultura* was a Herculean task, as many trees were large enough that it would take two men to reach around them. In fact, some of the larger trees were frequently left standing.

After cutting down the underbrush and at least part of the trees, the next step was burning—usually a month or two later when everything was dry as kindling.

This brings us to the setting for this story. Many years ago Daniel Kramer had approximately 25 acres of woods—the *cultura* type—below his house, along the Monte Alegre River. A man by the name of Adão, together with his brothers, cleared the woods, let the brush dry the necessary amount of time, and then set fire to everything. While hungry flames leaped upward, devouring everything in their path, Adão told Daniel a story. Some years ago he retold it to me, but I forgot most of the details, so this morning I walked over to Daniel's place and heard it again. Obviously, some of the details and the dialogue which I relate here are imaginary. However, the basic story is true.

Two men took the job of clearing a woods about the same size as Daniel's, that also ran along a river. The day came to set fire to the dry underbrush.

Luís and Pedro (as we shall call them) were along the river bank at one edge of the woods. They carefully made plans. One of them, Luís, would remain where he was. Pedro would walk around the woods all the way to the riverbank at the far end of the woods. Then he would holler loudly, which would be the signal that each one should begin lighting the underbrush. They would both walk uphill, away from the river, setting fire to the edge of the woods as they went. They would then meet at more or less the halfway point on the topside of the woods.

The plan was good. By doing it this way, they should get a good, even burn. Only the larger logs and some of the greener branches should be left. Later, after the branches had dried some more, they could be piled up and burned. The logs could be drug out and sawed for lumber, or left to slowly rot. Since the farming would be done by hand, they wouldn't really bother that much.

We hear Luís say, "Now you got that straight, Pedro? When you holler I'm going to begin setting fire to my side. You do the same. We'll meet at the river. Okay?"

"Okay. But listen, Luís, don't you start your fire before I holler. Understand?"

"Yah, I understand. But hurry up. We don't have all day."

Pedro loves nature. As he begins walking around the woods to once again reach the river bank, he thinks of all the small animals that die in the fire. It will be a trap. On one side the river, and as they rapidly set fire to two sides of the woods, few animals will escape.

This troubles Pedro. He remembers a tree that he left standing near the river because way up, in a hollow branch, there were some parrots obviously making a nest. Doing a quick mental calculation, Pedro comes to the conclusion that the little birds should be nearly ready to fly.

Pedro has seen woods burn before. It is both a majestic and terrible sight. The heat is intense. The roaring of the flames, the crashing of branches is unnerving. Anyone who has any knowledge of the Bible will most certainly remember passages that talk about hell.

For some reason Pedro can't get the little birds out of his mind. Somehow they epitomize the hundreds of small animals that are about to die.

If only he could save those little parrots. If only…

Pedro knows his partner well. He is an impatient fellow. He's also practical. Sacrifice is often the price of progress. Sure, lots of small animals will die, but so what? Think of how many sacks of corn and beans will be harvested on these 25 acres.

As Pedro hurries toward the river, he keeps glancing to his right. The tree is still there. While he watches, he sees the mother parrot hop out of the nest. Just that quick he sees three small heads in the opening in the log. The mother seems to be encouraging her children to fly. But it's a bit too early. Nature itself tells the little birds that in a day or so, they will be developed enough to leave their nest.

Pedro knows he can't catch the lizards, the snakes, the quail, the deer, that are in the woods. They are doomed. But these birds…

Suddenly, almost without knowing why, Pedro makes a decision. With quick deliberate steps he wades into the dry underbrush. In several moments he is rapidly climbing the tree. It won't be easy. The hole in the limb where the parrots have made their nest is in an awkward position. He will have to lean forward, insert one arm, while carefully hanging on with the other arm and his legs. Should he slip, it would most certainly be his last slip.

As we have said, Luís is an impatient fellow. He has tied several palm fronds together. Once he gets the signal from Pedro, he will quickly light them. Dragging them behind him, he makes his way around the woods, letting them do their deadly work.

Luís has no watch. He doesn't need one. He knows how long it should take to get to the other side of the woods. Pedro should be there already. Few things irk Luís more than to wait. He gets out his old gasoline cigarette lighter and tests it. It works. One quick turn of the wheel and he will be in business.

Something tells Pedro he should give up—get back down and get on with the program. Should he slip, there will be no second chance. Below him are dozens of sharp little stumps of underbrush, cut off diagonally by the razor sharp *foices*.

Pedro works himself along the branch. He can now touch the hole. He begins to insert his arm. The little birds screech in terror. The parents fly around in small circles, afraid to attack the giant who is raiding their nest. The birds are in farther than he had expected. Sliding out a bit more, Pedro reaches until he touches the little parrots.

Luís is almost beside himself. The sun is in the exact position where it's heat is maximum—something needful to get a good clean burn. What has happened to Pedro?

Suddenly Luís hears a shout. It comes from the other side of the woods. "Luiiiiiiiiiiiiiiís! Me ajude." (Luís! Help me.)

Pedro is puzzled. He heard his name, but the last two words were unintelligible. There it is again, "Luís! Não acenda o fogo!" (Luís, don't light the fire!)

This time Luís understands only the last part of what is said: "…acenda o fogo!" (… light the fire!) Being more impatient than prudent, Luís twirls the wheel on his lighter. Moments later his palm frond torch is ready to go. The smoke begins to rise.

Pedro carefully clutches one of the small birds in his work calloused hand. He is sweating. The sun is hot—very hot. He begins to feel weak. Suddenly his feet, twined around the tree, slip. His body falls into space—and hangs there. His arm, stuck in the hollow branch to the elbow, doesn't budge.

A sharp crack tells Pedro his arm is broken. Involuntarily, he shouts, "Luiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiís! Me ajude!"

Suddenly realizing what the consequences will be if Luís misunderstands what is happening, he calls again, "Luís! Não acenda o fogo!"

Pedro twists his body to regain a hold on the branch of the tree. However the pain and the position in which he is in, leave him totally helpless.

Luís doesn't waste time. He has travelled but a short distance before he hears the crackle and roar of the flames behind him. The wind is on his back and the fire is actually coming toward him. He begins to run, showering sparks and fire as he goes. Why doesn't Pedro light his fire? What has gone wrong? Oh well, maybe his cigarette lighter didn't work. Maybe he lost it. And with this wind, the fire will soon be there.

Hanging there, in excruciating pain, Pedro is horrified to see a wisp of smoke at the far end of the woods. Didn't Luís understand?

In a matter of seconds, the wisp becomes a dark column of smoke, and the column a curtain. A rapidly advancing curtain.

Luís must run fast to keep the flames away from his back. The flames, fanned by the very wind they have helped create, are angry, vicious. They leap. They snap. They crack. As they dehydrate the leaves on the tall trees in their path, they climb, twenty, thirty, forty feet, sometimes peeping out of the dense smoke.

Scurrying animals don't have a chance. Quail take wing, only to drop to the earth limp, after they get into the superheated air overhead. Snakes and lizards are toasted to a crisp.

Luís tosses his palm frond aside. He begins to run for dear life. Never has he seen such a fire. Where is Pedro?

When Luís arrives at the river, he plunges in. The flames rage over him.

The intense flames soon subside, but the heat and smoke continue. Only the taller trees remain standing. Even they glimmer like a Christmas tree as small fires perch on the ends of their branches, dehydrated by the awful heat.

Luís is beside himself. Where is Pedro? He runs home and hysterically tells his family that something has happened to his friend. It isn't until the second day after the fire that things have cooled down enough to begin to walk on the parched, hot soil. The ground is littered with charred carcasses. While Pedro and half a dozen others search desperately for something that would look like human remains, someone looks up, turns deathly white, and hoarsely shouts, "Alí!" (There!). They all see it. A charred mass hanging from a branch.

A misunderstanding.

Misunderstandings can usually be patched up. But not this one.

Sometimes we too become impatient. We act in haste. When we compose ourselves, when our tempers have cooled down, we find out we have misunderstood.

Sometimes we can go back and say, I'm sorry. We patch things up.

Sometimes, however, when we finally realize what we have done, we must say, I'm sorry, to a charred personality, to a destroyed character.

Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

Pedro died because of a misunderstanding. Luís lit a fire when he shouldn't have.

Do we ever do that?

Luís could have said, "Well, if he would have done what we agreed to do, instead of climbing a tree, everything would have been okay."

How true!

But if there wouldn't have been a misunderstanding, Pedro could have been saved. Yes, his arm would have been broken, but he would have eternally thanked Luís for coming to his rescue.

And the tongue is a fire, which sometimes gets away from us because of a misunderstanding *and setteth on fire the course of nature.*

Before we act or speak hastily, may we remember a charred body hanging in a tree. ▲

Life in Brazil

Yesterday and Today

A lot has changed in Brazil in the last 40 years we have lived here…

GOVERNMENT. When we moved to Brazil in 1969 the country was ruled by a military dictatorship. It began as a time of prosperity in what was internationally known as the "Brazilian Miracle." The intentions of the generals were good, but governing by force never brings good results. Finally they shut down congress, making their power

nearly absolute. In all fairness it should be pointed out that so far as the Colony, we had nothing to complain about.

After the military relinquished power, there was a period of turbulence as democracy was restored. Today the government is democratic with absolutely no interference from the military. All democracies have their imperfections and Brazil certainly has its share. But after analyzing what Brazil has done for the American colony over the last 40 years, we shouldn't complain.

INFLATION. The classical question of what causes inflation has a thousand and one answers. What we do know, from observation, is that what feeds inflation is a perverse and inverse Robin Hood effect in which a few make fortunes by depressing the masses. If no one got rich on inflation, it would implode.

From a high of two percent PER DAY, we are now at approximately five percent PER YEAR. High inflation turns money worthless, thus the need to periodically cut zeros off the currency. On at least four occasions three zeros were snipped off our currency.

ROADS. When we moved to Brazil there were no paved roads connecting our local town of Rio Verde with the outside world. The 140 miles to Goiânia, our state capital, could easily take four or more hours and leave the vehicle covered either with mud or dust. Breakdowns were frequent.

Today we have paved roads stretching in all directions from town. Unfortunately, after years of little maintenance some of them are in really bad shape. The worst highway is the one from Rio Verde to Montividiu that takes us to the Colony. If promises could be turned into asphalt, this would be one of the best roads in the country. It is said that the highway from Goiânia to Cuiabá, that goes through Rio Verde, will be turned into a four-lane road before the 2014 Olympics, which are to be held in Brazil.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS. When we moved to Rio Verde, our only communication with the outside world was by telegram. Telephone service was only within the city limits and limited to some businesses and very few homes. Just to acquire the right to a telephone could cost up to several thousand dollars and take over a year to be installed. A rural telephone was something people didn't even dream about.

Today a residential or business phone can be acquired for a nominal installation fee with a wait of less than 24 hours. Almost everyone owns at least one cellular phone. It is possible to drive down a Colony road while chatting with someone in most anyplace in the world.

SHOPPING. Forty years ago the largest grocery story in town was a small establishment that sold only staples as well as burlap bags for storing rice (all rice harvested back then was sacked up), bulk sugar, coffee beans… Anyone wanting something more sophisticated had to make the trip to Goiânia, that, as mentioned, could take four to six hours.

Today we have at least a half dozen large supermarkets with at least 20 checkout stands. Construction has begun on a Carrefour supermarket that will probably have 30-40 checkouts. We can get all we need locally, plus a lot we don't need—and buy anyway.

FARMING. Since farmers didn't use fertilizer, no fertilizer could be purchased. A lot of the rice was planted by hand and harvested by hand. But for the fields large enough for a combine, there was a tiny self-propelled machine with a VW engine and a six foot header, plus a few slightly larger models.

In the recent Tecnoshow, a farm show hosted by the local Coop, there were acres of machines that would have been considered science fiction when we first moved here. Today, almost anything available in N America can be purchased here.

VEHICLES. When we moved to Rio Verde a new or fairly new Jeep was a status symbol. The good thing was that after intense use on bad roads, it could be taken to the shop where it was torn down and rebuilt, resulting in what appeared to be a new Jeep. There were a lot of VW bugs and kombis. Most of the trucks were single-axle Mercedes. One day in town I saw an agglomeration of people on the street gazing at something. It was a small semi truck, something they had never seen before.

Today our roads, both highways and country roads, are loaded with enormous trucks. In the approximately 15 miles of highway we travel from town before turning off for the Colony, we often meet at least 50 trucks. Since weight limits aren't enforced, it is no wonder our roads don't hold up. Car dealerships have proliferated and today there are a lot of cars and pickups circulating that cost 60 thousand US dollars, or more.

ELECTRICITY. Forty years ago Rio Verde was a town with a population of 30 thousand (today it is 130 thousand). Electricity was furnished by a generator on a waterfalls on a nearby river. It was said you could predict the weather by the electricity, which would go off a day before a heavy rain. There was no such thing as rural electricity.

Today we are integrated into the national grid and few farms are still in the dark. Our power outages are only a fraction of what they used to be.

DOCTORS AND HOSPITALS. I remember when there were less than a dozen doctors in town, almost all general practitioners.

Today there are well over a hundred covering all major specialities.