

# Brazil News

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Editorial

## **The Junk Room**

In the book of Luke the question is asked, “What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?”

This parable is quite brief and leaves much to our imagination. And so it’s easy to imagine that the lady had the ten pieces of silver in a little bag that she kept under her mattress. Often she would get the little bag out and count her money. One day, during this little ritual, she comes up short one piece of silver.

That is ten percent of her liquid assets, so she becomes quite excited. She figures no one stole it, because a thief would take all of the money. A careful inspection of the bag shows that a seam has burst and there is a hole big enough for a silver coin to slip through.

Lighting a candle she checks under the bed. Nothing. Under the dresser. Nothing. Finally she finds it in a little crack in the floor. “She calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.”

Maybe that’s the way it happened. Since we don’t know, we’ll just call the woman Mary, which is quite a Biblical name, and change the plot a bit.

Mary isn’t wealthy. She lives alone in a little house that she is buying on payments. Through hard work and frugal living, she is able to set aside enough money to make her payment at the end of each year. The loan is a ten-year loan made by an individual. At the end of this period, after the final payment is made, she must present the ten receipts to her creditor and he will give her a title to the house. Should she not have all the receipts, she loses everything she has paid.

It is after the final payment has been made and Mary is preparing to take the ten receipts to her creditor, that she discovers that one receipt is missing. She knows that

her creditor is totally honest. And totally merciless. Unless she finds the missing receipt, she will have lost ten years of hard work. According to the contract, she doesn't have the right to work another year and make another payment. Because of her age, it's a loss that will be irrecoverable.

Mary believed that her receipts would be safer if each one was hidden in a different place. A thief, she reasoned, wouldn't very likely find only one or two receipts. What she didn't take into consideration was that to lose one was the same as losing them all. So by having them scattered over the house actually made her more vulnerable than if she would have kept all the receipts together.

We have said that Mary was a frugal person. She hated to throw anything away. She saved all empty pill bottles, because someday she might find a need for them. She saved all the bags and boxes she got in the grocery store. If an appliance would go shot, she would buy another one, but save the old one—just in case...

In a throwaway society, it would seem to be a virtue to not readily throw anything away. So Mary stored all her bottles and bags and broken appliances and old clothes and newspapers and magazines in boxes. Soon there were boxes poking out from under her bed, boxes in corners, and boxes all over. The place began looking shabby. So one day she decided to put all the boxes in the spare bedroom.

The effect was miraculous. Suddenly the house looked tidy, just like other people's houses. It's true she could no longer have overnight guests, but that was a sacrifice she became willing to make. Best of all, since she kept the spare bedroom locked, people began commenting, "It looks like Mary has made a change. Her house really looks nice."

But let's face the facts. Mary's guest room was now a junk room. From then on anything that she felt needed to be saved (which was almost everything), was "stored" in the junk room. Finally it was full and boxes began peeking out from beneath her bed again. Some of the corners had boxes stacked up again. That was the situation when the one receipt turned up missing.

Since Mary didn't believe in throwing anything away, she knew that her receipt was somewhere... somewhere in one of the boxes under the bed or in the junk room.

Word got around about Mary's dilemma. Neighbors came over to see if they could be of any help. But there was little they could do. She refused to let anyone go through her things. Knowing her idiosyncrasy, different ones diplomatically suggested that maybe she should "sort out her things." The message came through clear enough and Mary would sweetly say, "You know, I may just have to do that."

Mary was quite sure that the missing receipt was in the bottom of one of the many boxes. That is where she had the habit of hiding them. But in which one?

The first box Mary retrieved from the junk room was a box of old shoes. She was almost positive the receipt wouldn't be in this box, but even so she upended it on the living room floor. Lovingly she looked at the old shoes that had served her so well. True, they were shot, not even good enough to give away. But what memories they held. Carefully she repacked them in the box.

Next came a box of pine cones which she had gathered over a period of years. Since they were from the pine tree in her back yard, she felt a sentimental attachment to them. Carefully she repacked the moldy pine cones.

There was a box of old Sears & Roebuck catalogs, so interesting to look at (although she didn't have time to do so). They were repacked. And so, box after box was unpacked and repacked. But no receipt. Slowly but surely the living room was filling up.

Then something interesting happened. Mary dumped a box of rusted pots and pans on the floor. After the fine reddish dust had settled, she spied some large serving spoons mixed in among the junk. She let out a whoop of joy—loud enough to where several neighbors thought maybe she had found the missing receipt. Actually, she wasn't even thinking about the receipt just then. She had been needing these spoons for a long time but absolutely couldn't find them. On impulse, she chucked the rusted pots and pans in the box and carried it to the front yard. This box would go to the city dump.

Soon Mary let out another whoop. Some lost dress material showed up. Another box of junk went out to the front yard. And another and another...

Neighbors sagaciously shook their heads as they went by. "It looks like Mary is actually doing some house cleaning," they remarked.

Mary chucked a number of boxes of junk. But quite a few boxes she didn't even open. She felt quite certain the receipt wasn't in them. And others, as we have mentioned, she opened, but decided to keep.

Finally at the end of the day, there was a nice sized pile of junk outside the house. Nice enough to impress the neighbors. On the kitchen table were a number of lost items (some of which she didn't even remember existed) which she found in her cleaning up process.

But the living room was a mess. It would have to be cleaned up. Suddenly Mary had an idea. Because of the junk she was throwing away, what was left would fit into her pantry. The guest room would once again be a guest room.

With gusto Mary tore into the boxes scattered on the living room floor and carried them to the pantry. Before long the living room was clear, except for the "found" items on top of the table.

But the pantry, alas, was now the junk room.

Mary quickly swept and mopped the floor in the living room and the guest room. Then she ran to the phone and began calling her neighbors. "Come see my house!"

Neighbors were impressed by 1) the big pile of junk in the front yard awaiting the garbage truck, 2) by the guest room door that was now wide open, and 3) by the tidiness of Mary's house.

The festive air was abruptly broken when a neighbor lady—one of those ladies that you find at least one of in each community—suddenly asked, loud enough for everyone to hear, "Mary, and the missing receipt, did you find it...?"

Mary seemed to be prepared for this question. "I found more stuff than you can imagine," she answered, and added, "Doesn't my guest room look nice?"

You can shake some people with smooth talk, but not the kind of lady Mary was

dealing with now. Her eyes narrowed to slits, she observed, “Mary, what did you do with the rest of the junk? There was a LOT more junk in this house than what you have out in the front yard.”

A few hairline cracks appeared in Mary’s façade. But her answer was convincing enough that only the loud neighbor lady noticed. “Oh, I stuck a few boxes of stuff away to go through later.”

Rather than getting a merry-go-round going, the neighbor lady began conducting her own little tour. She looked into the main bedroom. Neat as a pin. She checked the bathroom. Everything in order. She tried the pantry door. Locked.

“Mary! Open this door!”

Knowing her neighbor’s persistence, she meekly opened the door.

“Mary! What do you plan on doing with all this junk when you have to get out of this house?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean. You have NOT found the missing receipt, have you? Without that receipt you’re going to lose this house. You’re going to have to rent a little house that not even all of your furniture will fit into, let alone this junk.”

The startled look in Mary’s eyes told the neighbor lady that her words found their mark. Turning to the neighborhood ladies, she ordered, “OK folks, let’s get out. Mary has some urgent work that only she can do.”

The last one to leave, as she got to the door, the loud neighbor lady turned and said, “Mary, that stuff you found isn’t going to do you much good either if you have to get out of here. Now, here’s my advice: Go through the rest of your boxes. Junk your junk. Someplace you’re going to find that receipt!” She left.

Mary sat down on the couch, her head in her hands. Feelings of self pity overwhelmed her. Why, why couldn’t she have her house AND her belongings (not junk)? Why did she have to lose that one receipt? No, definitely it wasn’t fair. Why her?

Then came feelings of rebellion. No, she wasn’t going to throw one more thing away. Let her creditor throw her out. Maybe then her neighbors would see how unfair, how unkind, they were being to her.

There were also feelings of desperation. Leave this house? Live in a cheap rented house?

A little voice began speaking. “Mary, what do you want—your junk or a title to this house? What good does all that junk do you? Is it really making you happy?”

Something akin to anger suddenly filled Mary’s soul. This house was going to be hers . . .

In the very first box she pulled out of the pantry and opened Mary found the missing receipt. She looked at it for several moments, placed it with the nine receipts, and kept right on working.

She didn’t so much as bother to open the rest of the boxes. Junk. Trash. The pile in front of her house was soon enormous. She called the trash collector. “Yes, yes, I know that today isn’t your day to collect trash on my street, but it’s an emergency . . .”

There wasn't a single woman within sight of Mary's house who wasn't peeping out of the curtains. They saw the trash man pull up in his truck. They saw him shake his head in bewilderment. They saw when Mary, clutching a manila envelope to her bosom hurried out of the house and headed up the street. They saw when approximately an hour later she returned with just a small envelope. They saw her stop at the front gate (the trash collector had already left) and pause for several moments to look at her house. They saw her walk into the front door. They didn't see her head directly to the phone and call the loud neighbor lady. (She knew it wouldn't be necessary to call anyone else.)

Doors began opening up and down the street. Even on other blocks. Not all the ladies fit into the house. Even so inside happenings kept filtering out. "She keeps saying, "This house is MINE! I've got a title to prove it... Am I glad to be rid of all that old junk! Worthless stuff ... Why, do you know that I even cleaned my refrigerator out and dumped all the junk... And it's so nice to be able to use all the rooms in my house... This is the happiest day of my life...'"

[Good reader, do you suppose I ought to change the title of this article from "The Junk Room" to "The Revival that Almost Wasn't"?] ▲

## Life on the Colony

by Gloria Holdeman

### **The Kidnapping**

**as Seen Through the Eyes of a 14-Year Old**

[This is the story of the recent kidnapping as told by Gloria, Caleb & Joanne Holdeman's 14 year old daughter, in a letter to friends.]

It took place the 24th and 25th of September. It's fun to be the center of attention, but it was the most horrible and scary situation at the moment!

We went to church Wednesday night for a grocery shower. Dad wanted to go home early, around 9:00 p.m. Well, we got left from church around 9:15. We got home and Mom was the first in the house and then came back to let us out of the pickup (she had carried in the tray of bars). Our pickup is an extended cab so there is only one door on each side. Anyways, she said we had a ghost in the house, cause the back door was slightly ajar. Earlier in the week or month we had been joking about ghosts, because one time we went to town and came home and here our front door was wide open and another time we came home in the evening and our utility door was open. A couple of our doors had trouble latching. So, when Mom said that the back door was ajar, we thought nothing of it.

We got out of the pickup and went inside. I saw mud clods on the floor. I thought it was strange because it wasn't muddy at church nor at home. I asked Mom to look at her

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shoes, but they weren't muddy and I knew it wasn't mine because I hadn't been in the kitchen yet, just Mom had.

I then followed the tracks to the utility and I happened to look at the rug and here it was just filthy! Then Mom and I saw a huge club on the counter and an open package of cookies. Mom asked Dad if he had brought the club in before we went to church and then Dad said that that was a club for dogs. Then we for sure knew that someone had been in the house, but we thought that this someone would of left already, because one other time we had a [somewhat mentally perturbed] neighbor man come in and steal some food and Dad's watch, so we thought it was him again.

OK, I walked down the hall, following the tracks to my bedroom. I switched on the light and then I saw a tote bag on one side of my bed and on the other side I saw a shoulder of a man! He moved a little bit. I thought he was drunk or something of the like. I switched off the light quick as a wink and then ran back to the dining room where the rest of the family was and told Dad that there was a man in my room! Dad thought that this time we had caught him in the act. So he wasn't all that scared. Dad started walking back there to check this out, but got only to the utility and then there were these six guys with guns and knives upon us. They had sawed off shot guns, revolvers and wicked looking knives. They yelled, "Desce! Desce! Desce!" (Get down! etc.) Dad knelt down right away in the utility and Mom and us children knelt down in the kitchen. These guys were dancing around with their guns and knives. They were masked and acted terribly nervous! They were yelling, "Amarrem! Amarrem! Amarrem!" (Tie them up! etc.)

Then they tied our hands behind our backs. They asked us if our hands hurt and if they did hurt, they tied them looser. While they were tying us up, Mom and Dad were praying aloud. They took our big ice chest with food inside it and then also took a pan and our hand held two-way radio.

Well, they were gonna take us in our car, but they were dumb cause how could six guys with five of us all fit into the car? I guess they saw that too, so we were all transferred to our pickup. They cut Dad's ropes so he could drive to the highway and in the meantime they nicked his hand with the knife.

We all got in the pickup and were on our way. "Anda, rapaz! Anda rapaz! Anda!" (Get with it, guy! etc.) When they stopped a ways from the highway to blindfold Mom and us children, they had Dad shut off the lights. "Apague a luz! Apague a luz!" (Shut off the lights! etc.)

When they did blindfold us, they cut up their teashirts [sic] right there and then. Boy! You should of smelled them! They reeked! They didn't blindfold Dad until we got to the highway.

While we were driving to the highway after we were blindfolded, my hands started hurting, so I had them retie mine. They had Dad pull onto the highway to the side. Dad pulled the emergencies and then moved over to the middle seat. Then they blindfolded him. One guy got out and went around to the drivers side. He jumped in and was going to take off, but stalled the pickup because the emergencies were on. Dad had to show them how to put the emergencies off.

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We started on our way again. This guy did not know how to drive very good at all! When he would shift the pickup would jerk like everything! I got a very sore shoulder because of banging against the window so much. He drove terrible fast for someone that didn't know how to drive very good. Mom was worried we would have a wreck, but she thought it wouldn't matter, because then it would end this kidnapping.

Before we got to town, they turned off on a dirt road and drove a ways. Then we stopped and the guys got out and had a conference. When we started on our way, he stalled the pickup again! We were going to turn around and head back towards town, but they could not get it into reverse, so Dad told them how, but they still didn't know how, so Dad had to do it for them. Funny!

We got to town and we took the side roads. When we got to town they covered us with a blanket. Out of town and on the road toward Goiânia we drove for 20 km. and then turned off on a dirt road. One time the guys on the back yelled to the driver that we weren't going the right way, so we stopped and backed up to turn around, but we backed up too far and went off the road. We spun a little, but got out. Another time we were going too fast to make a corner, so overshot the road. Later when Mom and Dad went back there with the police, Mom said we had almost had a wreck.

As we were driving they were talking on a walkie-talkie to try to impress us, as if they were a big gang with a boss!

The other day in town I saw walkie-talkies exactly like the ones the kidnapers had. They were toy ones. We drove for a ways and then we stopped again and they all got out and had another conference. Then they told us to get out. Boy, that was hard cause our hands were tied and also we were blindfolded, so they practically had to carry us out. Mom and us children got out and then Dad tried to get out, but they told him to stay there. One man took me by my arm and he reached behind me to see if my hands were still tied. When they retied my hands, they tied them so loose that the ropes were coming undone. He laughed and asked me if they had come untied.

One man took Mom and Marshall. One man took Winfield and one stayed with Dad. They led us to the shed. The guys were real careful. If there was something in the way, they would say, watch out, there is a log or rock here. I didn't stumble once and we went over campo land (native pasture) that had fallen logs and branches and rocks of all sizes. To the shed it wasn't that bad, but to the river it was bad.

Well, we got to the shed and there was a pile of cotton seed in the back. It was soft. We stood there in the shed awhile and then Mom asked for something to sit down on and they said something was coming. They brought us a blanket and spread it down on the cotton seed. We laid down on the blanket. Mom asked where Dad was and they said that he was going back to the fazenda to get money. When we laid down one of the guys made a nasty remark about Winfield. He said, "He won't be sleeping on a fancy bed like what he is used to!"

They unblindfolded us and untied our hands. They asked us if we wanted something to eat. But we didn't. Mom asked for a drink, but he said we would have to wait until the next day.

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We tried to sleep, but it was so terrible cold. We managed to sleep some.

Early in the morning, like around 5:00 or 5:30 o'clock, they came and woke us up and blindfolded us and tied our hands again. We walked for two kilometers to the river, where we stayed all day. They had to take us by our arms to lead us. Again they were real careful. They told us when to bend down because of tree branches and one time I straightened up when he hadn't told me to stand up and I banged my lip on a branch, but it didn't hurt. Anyways he laughed and asked if it had hurt. Another time I sighed and he asked if I was tired. We walked into the woods all the way to the bank of the Rio Verdão (Verdão River) and they put a blanket down so we could sit down, but they soon had us get up and then we went to a different place by the river and there we settled down for the day. When we got settled down it was around 6:30 a.m. When we sat down they untied our hands, but they did not take our blindfolds off. Then they came and asked us if we wanted something to eat. They gave us buns and rolls from our freezer and river water to drink. The river water was not clear. Marshall and Winfield devoured the rolls, but Mom and I had to force ourselves to eat. I only took three or four bites of a roll all day and for Mom it was about the same. So I was thin the next day. I liked that!

In about an hour one guy came and took our blindfolds off. He said it would not be good to have blindfolds on all day, but he said we should face the river, because they did not want us to watch them. Mom asked if we could do some exercises, so we would feel better and they said we could, so we did.

We dozed off and on all day. The day seemed to drag by. The men brought us rolls again for dinner. They brought us river water to drink! L

We had a hard time with Marshall because he was very active and he kept wandering around and wanting to go down to the river and anything you can imagine! Marshall was constantly laughing about everything and anything and at those men too. Those guys got a kick out of Marshall and Marshall got a kick out of them. One time those guys said, "What a cutie!" It made my mom think of the story "The Ransom of Red Chief."

Right soon after dinner one of the guys came and told us Dad would be coming in the evening with the money. I wondered if it would be \$100,000, but Mom said probably more. I guessed right.

Once we were all trying to lay down on this one blanket, but it wasn't big enough. They saw that, so they brought us another blanket about the same size, so I could lay down on that one so the others could have more room, but Mom was cold so she covered up with it instead.

Another time we were all standing (tired of sitting). Then Winfield laid down and covered up with a blanket. Then two of the men came and asked if Winfield was sick. Mom said no, but they said "He is so pale." Mom told them that he is very timid. They brought us a sheet and Winfield used that for a pillow. Around 3:30 p.m. it started thundering and then I noticed that the guys were cutting big palm branches from around there and Mom said that that was for a shelter. They got it almost all built



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before it started raining, so they finished it while we were under there. When it started to really pour, the guys got under there with us. Marshall really liked it under there. He thought it was like an Indian shelter. We stayed in there by ourselves for about a half hour or maybe an hour. Then they came and told us to get out. It was till drizzling. We had to walk back to the shed in a slight rain. We wouldn't of hardly got wet, but we did because of having to walk two kilometers in it. They did not blindfold us or tie our hands on the way back because we were in a big hurry.

We got back to the shed around 6:15 p.m. When we got to the shed we noticed there was some fertilizer bags and a spreader that hadn't been there before. They had us go sit behind the fertilizer sacks to wait out the time till Dad came. Mom asked one of the guys if Dad was really coming in the evening and this guy answered in a very impatient voice, "He has to come!"

While we were waiting for Dad one guy came and asked us if we wanted some water to drink and we did, so he went to get us some water and when he came back he had goiabas (guavas). There are lots of goiaba trees by the shed. They are delicious.

When it got dark they spread out a blanket on that same cotton seed and there we slept off and on till Dad came. Around 9:00 p.m. the guys came and told us to get up. We got up and started back towards the main road where the night before we had walked down to the shed, so we were hoping like everything that Dad had really come. They didn't blindfold us or tie our hands to walk back to Dad. Well, it was Dad after all. We climbed into the pickup and the six guys did too. Away we went. We had to stop once because one of the guys caps flew off because two of the men were on the back, you know. We weren't sure what was going to happen next. We drove back to the highway. Right before the highway there was a red car parked beside the road. We pulled in front of the car and then the men said that if we would tell the police they would come back and finish us off. Then they jumped out and we were alone together. They took the opposite direction as us. Glad!

Mom wanted Dad to hurry in case they decided to come back and ask something more of us. But they didn't. We drove to town and there we called to Grandpa Holdemans. We drove to Grandpas and there was met by all the Holdemans and Warkentins and some of the ministers. Big group. When we got out of the pickup there Marshall informed some of the people that we had been stolen. The clothes we were wearing were nearly ruined. We both had very light dresses on and we had to scrub to get them clean. Mine still has some spots on it, but you can hardly see them. My socks were unable to get clean.

The first Saturday we were home since we were kidnapped we got another scare because late Saturday night we had just got home to Grandpa Holdemans and we saw two very slow moving vehicles. The first one drove by the lane, but the second one turned in. Well, the second one was of our people. We wanted to write down the license plate of the first car. I was spooked by then and so was Mom. That car had been acting very strange because it had roared onto one of our people's yards and then roared off. It turned out to be an old man and he was lost and too he was too scared to stop and

ask for directions because he thought maybe he would be suspected of doing something and then he thought we would shoot him. Of course, we wouldn't do that, but he didn't know that. While they were driving they had a flat, but he was too scared to change the tire, so drove on the rim. I'm so glad it turned out to be nothing dangerous.

When they caught six of the guys and put them in prison, we went to see them. When we went to the prison we gave the guys tracts and Dad told them to look to God for help, or something like that. One of them told Dad sorry for what happened and he said he was the one that drove us to the old shed. Interesting!

A while after we went to see them one of them got out. When they caught him he was trying to cross the highway. He was barefoot and the side he was walking on was plowed field dirt and so it was hot and there were woods on the other side so he was going to walk in the woods. Just then the police happened along and they saw him. They weren't in a police car so when they stopped he didn't have time to run. The police think maybe he is a little simple because when the police picked him up he still had his prison card in his pocket. And also he had been walking barefoot all day in the woods with the snakes and so on. He also answered the police very slow. By the way, this guy's name is Júlio.

Before these six guys had been caught, three of them had gone into a clothing store in town and when they entered they were dressed very shabby and when they left they wore brand new clothes. When the three were going to buy all these new clothes, the clerks became suspicious and they held those guys there while they went to the bank to see if that money was real or counterfeit. Well, it was real money, so they let those guys go.

The 30th of September we went to the police station to be interviewed. We stayed there all day. Took terrible long! We always talked with the chief. He is a neat looking guy and very nice. He is 35 and married and they are going to have their first child in February. His name is Paulo Roberto.

The 9th of October we went to the police station again to see if they had more information. They had questioned the fellows already, so they did. Edson and Maciel are the leaders and they had been thinking about it for a long time already and the other six agreed to help.

Tuesday night, the 23rd, they came out and they had it planned to kidnap someone that night. They didn't have anyone in mind, but they wanted an American family. The Brazilians here think we are rich because of the houses we live in and because we farm so much land. Anyways, they were in two parties. Three of them came on motorcycle taxis and they said they were going fishing, but they didn't have fishing poles. The other three came on the bus. They were going to meet somewhere, but they hadn't made it plain enough so they got lost. One of the leaders had a pistol, so he shot it off and the others heard it and followed the sound. Well, they got together, all six of them, but by now it was 10:00 p.m. and they decided that that was too late so they spent the night in the woods in a tree!

All the next day they wandered around. Different ones saw them. When they got to the place where our road crosses the main road, they wondered whether they should go

up or down. If they would of gone down, they would of gone to Grandpa Holdemans. They came up instead. We are the third house from the main road. They passed the first house and the second house and they decided that they would try the third house, which is ours. Our doors weren't locked, so in they came . . .

Tuesday, the 14th of October, Dad got four men around to go have a small service at the jail. Another one of the kidnappers told a guard that he wanted to talk to Dad. He told Dad sorry for what he had done and to forgive him.

The 13th of November our family was in the living room reading a book when all of a sudden the back door slowly; creaked open. We all just sat there for awhile. Then Dad went to see if anybody was there. Nobody was there. The door hadn't been quite latched and there was a strong wind from that direction, so it blew open. Mom said I got white as a sheet and even my lips were colorless. ▲

## A Brazilian Story

by Mário de Moraes

### Local Celebrities

[Readers who have lived abroad will readily identify with what Mário de Moraes has to say about the local celebrities who live in the poorer sections of town—usually one to a bairro.]

During my childhood most every bairro had a “local celebrity,” In my particular part of town, Vila Isabel, we happened to have several. One of them, dona Alexandrina, was a very good friend of my mother's. Her particular obsession was to take care of the sick folks and help conduct funerals in her bairro. The moment that word would reach her about someone who was sick, she would head out to offer her help.

Dona Alexandrina would simply take over. If the case required a doctor, she would either go to his house personally or find a phone and call him (remember that very few people had phones back those days). She would go to the drugstore and fill the prescription, come back and give the shots or medicine at the proper time. And if the patient should happen to die, it would be dona Alexandrina who would prepare the body for burial and help with all the arrangements. Even though she was very poor, dona Alexandrina would never ask anything for her services, although she would gratefully accept any aid offered.

These memories came back after I read a letter from Denone Martins, one of my readers from São Caetano do Sul, in the state of São Paulo.

According to Denone, in the town of Salto, also in the state of São Paulo, there lived a very poor, backward man whose living depended on odd jobs and the good will of generous souls.

The poor fellow was nicknamed Zé Batatão, a name which he detested. Children,

and even adults, constantly tormented the poor creature. When he would finally lose his patience and give chase, wildly waving his cane, his tormentors easily eluded him among whoops of laughter.

The older inhabitants in Salto had an interesting story to tell about Zé, which took place during the terrible Spanish Plague that killed the greater part of the population.

The plague was spreading like wildfire and people were beside themselves with fear of being the next one. Back those days funeral homes were practically nonexistent. Relatives and friends took upon themselves the responsibility of taking their loved ones to their final resting place.

At least this was the case when the deceased wasn't a victim of the terrible Spanish Plague. In this situation, everyone was afraid to even get close to the corpse. Even those of the immediate family were careful to keep their distance. So when someone died, it was Zé, then still a young man, who would show up and haul the body to the cemetery in a small cart which he himself pulled.

It was a most thankless job. Hearing the noise of his cart, people would rush into their houses and bar their doors and shutters, fearful of contamination.

But Zé didn't show the slightest fear as he made many, many trips to the local cemetery on his dangerous mission.

Even though he was constantly exposed to contaminated bodies, Zé never got sick. When he finally died he was well advanced in years.

Unfortunately, people like dona Alexandrina and Zé Batatão no longer exist, especially in the larger cities. That is one of the reasons why this world is losing more and more of its human warmth. ▲

## The Tour

by Pat Baize

### **An American on the Rio Verdinho**

There are different types of people in this old world. There is the type that likes to try and analyze everything before getting into something. There is also the type that does the thing and then analyzes the consequences.

Sylvia and I were invited to Chris & Anita Soltzofus for dinner. After we had finished our meal, I asked Chris what he planned on doing the rest of the day. "Entertain you," was his unhesitating answer.

Being a foreigner in Brazil and not knowing Chris very well, I failed to grasp the subtle nuances of that answer. Innocently I asked him how he planned on doing that. He mentioned doing several things, like going swimming, seeing Walter Redger's hydroelectric plant, motor biking, etc. I told him that the tour of the hydroelectric plant sounded the most interesting.

Chris went in and talked with his wife. A short time later he came out with swimming trunks for both of us. He said that maybe we could get in a little swimming too.

But it was just the two of us and so Chris decided to invite Wagner Machado to go along. We found him out working on the tractor. It didn't take much coaxing. Only he had a better idea: tube down the Rio Verdinho. That struck Chris's fancy.

Walt Redger's farm borders the Rio Verdinho. So we decided to go to Walts to see if someone could take us down to the river and then pick us up downstream. We drove past Mervin Loewen's place and he too was out in the field. We decided to invite him along too. Later he put it like this, "Since Chris never invites me to go swimming, I decided to go."

We rounded up some tubes and aired them up. Some of them we had to patch first.

When we got to Walt's place, we talked to the hired man. After explaining our plan, he said he would take us to the river and then pick us up at the bridge in an hour.

Wagner got into the cab of the pickup to visit with the driver. The rest of us rode on the bed. The road was rutted and almost impassable. When we reached our jump-off place, we again discussed where and at what time to be picked up. I did mention that my brother-in-law Otávio and I have a 6:30 supper appointment.

The Rio Verdinho (Verdinho River) is a twisting river that at places almost doubles back upon itself. The bottom is strewn with dead trees (remember that most trees don't float in Brazil) and rocks. Much of the time it is covered with a canopy of trees, making it difficult to see the sky. Most of the way the banks are quite steep, although there are some really nice sandy beaches at places.

By the time we hit the water, it is 4:02 p.m. Propelled by the current, we begin our trip down river. So far so good.

As we float down the river I notice we are really out in the wild. I begin to get a bit nervous. I hear a lot of wildlife and ask about it. I am told not to worry, that anacondas aren't poisonous. They like to hang in trees and drop on their prey. For some reason I didn't find this thought especially consoling.

The Rio Verdinho has its share of snags. At places fallen trees dam up the river. This poses a much greater danger than anacondas. As the current sweeps under these trees, it tries to suck one under, which can be quite dangerous. It's easy to lose a tube in a situation like this. A real challenge is to dodge the tree limbs from submerged trees that stick up here and there. The tubes are quite maneuverable, but sometimes when three of us try to squeeze through the same gap at the same time, it does become complicated.

Even though we scrape and bang our feet on submerged trees and rocks, we are enjoying ourselves. I begin to ask questions and discover that none of the group has ever floated down this particular stretch of river before. First the anacondas shook me up. Now it was the hospitality of my new Brazilian friends that made me wonder what was going on.

When we had our first rest stop, my watch showed 5:20 p.m. It doesn't take a whole lot of math to figure out that we have been floating down the river for well over an

hour and no one knows where the bridge is. We slide back into the river and continue our journey.

A short time later we come around a bend and Mervin gets the bright idea of making a raft. He gets out of the water and ties several sticks to his tube with a vine. But the raft ended up conducting itself much like a submarine, so finally he abandoned the idea.

Chris is a sort of a naturalist, so he is constantly seeing birds flying overhead or perched in the trees, animal tracks, or the animals themselves. At this point he would jump out of the river and satisfy his curiosity. Upon returning to his tube, he would tell what he had seen. Once he even disturbed a napping tapir.

About an hour later we arrive at the spot where we had hoped to be picked up, but since there was no one waiting, we continued floating down river.

Finally we pass a set of power lines. My good friends cheerfully say, "Not far anymore."

I finally got tired of being a fish and decide to walk along the bank for a ways. Chris follows me out. He recognizes the place and says that we can walk out from here. The time is now 7:28 p.m.

Here's a little rundown on how almost three and a half hours affected each member of our group:

Mervin – always cheerful

Wagner – Quiet (as usual)

Chris – Alternately cheerful and grumpy

Otávio – Game for anything

Pat – Quite nervous

We stood on the bank and discussed the options. Chris and I voted for walking. Mervin and Wagner thought it couldn't be too far and that it would be more practical to go by water. Otávio was neutral.

We had walked a little ways when in the distance we could see the bridge. Mervin didn't think it was too far. Chris said it could be at least 10 kilometers. Whatever it was, all I know is that we had to climb up from that river walking on gravel with our bare feet. For those used to walking shoeless, it was no big deal. That wasn't my case.

We walked for a ways carrying our tubes. Finally Chris put his down and said, "Mervin can pick these up here." That made going somewhat easier.

We were walking along when Mervin said that there was an anteater down below and that if we would look at a certain place we would see it. I looked but didn't see it, so started walking again. "It's moving into the open. Pat, this is your chance."

I didn't take the chance. Now don't get me wrong. It isn't that I didn't want to see an anteater, but by then I was so anxious to get out that not even an anteater could tempt me.

We walked through a pasture and just as we were going through the gate, our pickup showed up.

We got home about about 9:00. We didn't miss our supper. But Chris missed his school board meeting. ▲

## BN Tour I

Because of our isolated position in relation to congregations in N Ame-rica, we never seem to get enough visitors. So, as can be imagined, we on the Colony are thoroughly enjoying the tour group.

The passengers of BN Tour I met in Orlando, Florida on November 26 and left on Transbrasil for a direct flight to Brasília, arriving at 8:30 the next morning. A 26-seat sleeper bus had been hired to bring the group back to the Colony.

After getting through customs, the group boarded the bus and a quick tour was made of Brasília. First of all was a short visit to the cathedral right in the center of the city. Then the bus continued down the broad avenue toward the Praça dos Três Poderes where the two houses of Congress and the Ministry of Justice are located. Another stop was made at the TV tower and the elevator was taken to the observation deck. After viewing the city from this vantage point, the bus left Brasília for the Colony in Rio Verde.

Why a sleeper bus? Most people don't sleep well on a plane. I believe this must have been the case with this group. The bus hadn't traveled very far before most of the passengers were slumbering and sleeping.

The first stop was made near Anápolis, a city some 50 kilometers from Goiânia, at a churrascaria (restaurant that serves grilled meat). It was anything but a fancy restaurant, but the food was good—at least to those of us who are used to Brazilian food.

The next stop was in Goiânia to pick up Jessica Dirks, the teacher in the mission school. She wanted to spend some time with her grandparents, Harold & Emma Dirks, who are part of the group.

Two of the passengers met their ride in Rio Verde and the rest continued on to the Colony, arriving at more or less 6:30 p.m. We had called ahead so different ones were waiting to take the passengers to their homes.

On Sunday there was a carry-in dinner at the Monte Alegre social hall so that everyone could become acquainted with the visitors. I understand that next Sunday there will be a carry-in dinner at the Rio Verdinho Congregation.

Those on this tour are:

Clayton & Anita Yost, from Hesston, Kansas,  
Dave & Juanita Ensz, from Grant, Nebraska,  
Delano Koehn, from Buhl, Idaho,  
Edwin & Dorothy Schmidt, from Montezuma, Kansas,  
Emery & Rose Yost, from Hesston, Kansas,  
Harold & Emma Dirks, from Bonners Ferry, Idaho,  
Irvin & Ruth Williams, from Sharon Springs, Kansas,  
John & Minnie Becker, from Hesston, Kansas,  
Julie Ratzlaff, from Galva, Kansas,  
Pat & Sylvia Baize, from Irquois, South Dakota,  
Randy & Terri Ensz, from Grant, Nebraska,  
Suellen Johnson, from Galva, Kansas.

# Brazil News

Next month we will have a report on a trip part of the group and some from the Colony took to Iguazu Falls and Paraguay, where several Mennonite communities were visited.

BN Tour II is to get here in the beginning of January.

For future tours, contact Pat & Sylvia Baize, at 605 546 0244.