

# Brazil News

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Editorial

## **Experiences**

In Holdeman Mennonite circles the word “experience” has taken on a broader meaning than that found in the dictionary—a beautiful meaning, we hasten to add: a special encounter with God.

(This meaning is not limited to the English language. In Portuguese, and I feel confident that in other languages as well where the church is present, the word “experience,” though spelled and pronounced differently, carries this same special connotation.)

When a young boy or girl is asked, “Have you had an experience yet?” the question is perfectly understood. It means, “Have you been born again?” or “Have you been converted?”

According to its dictionary usage, what is an experience? It’s “Active participation in events or activities, leading to the accumulation of knowledge or skill” (AHD). Thus to read about Yosemite National Park in National Geographic Magazine is one thing, but to go there personally and stand in the fine mist of Bridal Veil Falls is very much another. It’s an experience.

It would be strange indeed to find a man or a woman who would have no desire to be saved. A raunchy actress was asked about her religious convictions. She answered, “I light a candle for the devil and another for God,” thus assuming her own wickedness, yet hoping to somehow accumulate enough points with Heaven to squeeze through the gate at the end of the road.

What she had the audacity—and honesty—to say, expresses the hidden feeling of the masses. Of nominal Christianity. Instead of a full surrender, an effort is made to make points with the Gatekeeper (St. Peter, to many). The idea that conversion is the single most important happening in life is totally foreign to those who believe this way.

To us this experience is most important. May it ever be so. But that’s only the beginning of the story. And it’s not what this article is about.

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This brings us to another Holdeman Mennonite meaning of “experiences,” in the plural, which we will define as “frequent encounters with the Master which result in a sanctified and enjoyable Christian life.”

Let’s do a little test. You are unexpectedly taken from time into eternity and appear before the eternal Judge. He says, “Tell me an experience,” so you tell him your conversion experience. “That was a good experience,” He tells you, “but I’m looking for something different. Tell me of an experience you had in the last several days.”

In eternity no one racks his brains. No one scratches his head to remember. No, in eternity thoughts are crystal clear. The words “I forgot” don’t exist where there is no time. Either you had or didn’t have an experience with the Lord during the last several days. You know it and the Judge knows it. You either have something to tell or you don’t.

This little test you are taking is rather difficult. Your mind isn’t crystal clear like it will be in eternity (whether lost or saved). And so, like the passenger who is at the boarding gate and can’t find his ticket, do you desperately search the pockets of your mind in hopes of coming up with a nickel or dime experience to get you aboard?

Does your mind rush back to the last revival when you felt the Lord drew near? True, that was more than several days ago, but maybe if you tell that one . . .

One look at the stern face of the Judge tells you it’s not advisable to stretch several days into several months, or several years.

Just what kind of an experience are we talking about?

Our natural lives are a sequence of experiences. At least they should be. They are happenings that we talk about at the supper table. We bring them up during break or the lunch hour at work. We may even get on the phone and tell a close friend what happened to us during the day. We do this and think nothing of it. In fact, we enjoy doing it.

Some experiences we can hardly wait to tell about. This is especially true when the other person shares our particular interest. We feel a special satisfaction when we learn something in our experience and can transmit that knowledge to someone whom we know is having a similar difficulty.

Now let’s reverse this scenario. You are a mechanic. To change the clutch on a particular model of car or truck is a very complicated affair. Not only do you dread this job, but other mechanics you know feel the same way. One day, almost by accident, you discover a much easier way to carry out this procedure . . .

But you don’t tell any of your fellow mechanics. It isn’t that you don’t want them to know. You know that they would appreciate very much knowing about this new technique. But . . . well . . . you’re embarrassed to tell them . . .

Does that make sense? Any sense at all?

None whatsoever. But what if—and that’s what this article is all about—your job as a mechanic has become so routine, so “mechanical,” that nothing new ever happens, then what?

Then very likely you have joined the legion of workers who work because they are adverse to being without money, but their heart is far from their job and they don’t enjoy what they do. If the boss would suddenly come up to them and say, “Unless you

can tell me something interesting that happened on your job during the last several days, you're laid off," they would be without a job.

Conversion unquestionably is the single most important happening in our lives. But it isn't the greatest experience. The greatest is the experience you had with the Lord today, last night, or several days ago. In Christian life, that is the experience that says you have maintained contact with the Savior, or as we have said, it is proof of "frequent encounters with the Master which result in a sanctified and enjoyable Christian life."

Think of a Christian as a mountain climber who carries a long rope and a bag of pitons—"A metal spike fitted at one end with an eye for securing a rope and driven into rock or ice as a support in mountain climbing" (AHD) and a hammer. When the climber is unable to ascend unaided, he drives a piton in a crack in the rock, strings the rope through the eye and continues his ascent. Should he lose his grip on the rock, the rope threaded through the eye of the piton will break his fall.

Think of the Christian as a mountain climber, the rope as the conversion experience and the pitons as subsequent experiences. What happens if the climber ties the rope securely around his waist and confidently begins his ascent—without using his pitons? Of what use will his rope be when he loses his grip?

Think of the climber who ascends half way up the mountain regularly using pitons, but then begins to slack off. When going seems to be good, he figures he doesn't need so many. He forgets that whatever distance he has climbed above the last piton placed, is the distance he will fall below that same piton before his rope halts his fall. So the greater the distance between pitons, the greater the jolt will be in the event of a fall, and the greater the danger of the piton becoming dislodged.

It's hard to imagine that a climber would make a careful ascent with regularly placed pitons, and then, near the summit, grow careless and quit using them. For a climber to fall to his death with the goal in view is distressing, to say the least.

In Christian life we don't fall beyond our last solid experience. That is both a consolation and a solemn warning. If we have left behind us a series of closely spaced pitons, we can be sure we will not suddenly find ourselves at the bottom of the mountain. But on the other hand, if we have grown negligent or overconfident and have climbed hundreds of meters without placing a piton, a fall may well be fatal.

We are saved by an experience, but remain saved by experiences. If we really believe that, why is it so hard to talk about experiences? When the Lord speaks to us through a scripture, why not mention it at the appropriate time? When he helps us over an especially difficult ridge, why keep it quiet? When our "feet were almost gone," when our "steps had well nigh slipped," why not share the experience?

"Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."

Yes, the greatest experience in our life is the last one, the one that is still warm in our heart. It's the one the Lord will look for when He makes up his jewels. ▲

## Mozambique

by Eduardo Vieira da Silva

Chapter III

### **A Brazilian in Mozambique**

In the meantime, Marva and I stayed in the airport with Jesse's children until Weldon Koehns, the missionaries from there, came to get us. I felt like I was almost in shock—cultural shock or environmental shock, or whatever it was. In just a matter of minutes we found ourselves in a large city with beautiful buildings wherever we looked. Portuguese was no longer the language. Now we heard English or Shona spoken. Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, is a very modern city. Even the architecture has a definite English taste to it. There are many trees. The well stocked stores had many items I didn't even dream existed. This place bore no resemblance to the Africa I knew. Was I dreaming . . . ?

Jesse was taken to a very good hospital. After the doctor had given him some pain medication, he spent the night in Royce & Wilma Buller's house. The next day he went back for x-rays. They injected a contrast and he had a full-blown reaction. It almost killed him.

On Thursday he had surgery to remove a stone. He remained hospitalized until the next Sunday, the 19th. We didn't return home until the 24th, so that gave us time to do some shopping.

On Sunday, the 26th, we went to church in Maroeira. Fernando didn't show up. I couldn't figure out what was going on until João gave me a note from Fernando saying he wasn't going to be coming to church anymore because of problems with his wife. The next day Jesse, Dennis, João, Luciano and I went to pay him a visit in Chinoko, a little village hidden away in the woods some 50 km from there. This is where he worked and lived during the week.

We tried to help him, but things got worse instead of better in their marriage relationship. He simply gave up and went so far as to find himself another wife. Anesta quit going to doctrine classes. It was really a disappointment for us. When I left there, that is how things stood.

On the 29th Kelly Isaacs, the missionaries from Malawi, and the teachers, Maxine and Donica, came to pay us a visit and to be present at the baptisms set for the 30th and 31st. That afternoon we went to see the Cahora Bassa hydroelectric power plant. They gave us a tour in one of their busses. In the book *Guide to Mozambique* (Slater, Mike, Struik Publishers, Johannesburg, 1997), "The dam type is a double curved concrete arch. Dam height: 160 meters. Dam crest altitude: 331 meters. Lake length: 270 km. Generating potential : 4,000 megawatts." It's a beautiful place and on some of our visits we saw monkeys, squirrels and an assortment of gorgeous birds.

On the 30th we went to Tete for Samuel & Joana's baptisms, in the little church in Chimadzi. Baptism services were usually quite lengthy because of having to go through

two interpreters. At times it was hard work. Sometimes the speaker would forget to wait for both interpreters to do their thing.

But it was a special day. The church was being established in Mozambique. I couldn't get over how God opened the door for salvation to come to this solitary, unknown place, bypassing the rich, the famous and the mighty, those who weren't interested in the true faith.

After the baptism service, we had supper in Samuel's house and then we returned to Songo.

The following day, the 31st, Dennis, Kelly, Samuel and some others paid Emília a visit. She told her conversion experience and it was decided she should begin doctrine classes.

The little church in Maroeira was too small for the crowd that came out for the baptism service. João and some of the other men stretched some tarps between the church and some trees so that people could get out of the hot sun. Then the service began.

João told his experience in Shone while Samuel interpreted so we could understand. He told how that because of a sickness he began to call upon God to save his soul. Luciano also told how he found peace with God, how he felt he should quit using two of his shirts that had worldly things written on them. But then he had doubts because if he did away with those two shirts, what would he wear? Finally he decided to burn those two shirts.

The mother of these two young men, a witch doctor, was terribly upset with their decision, but on the day they told their experiences, she came to church too. When asked what she thought, the mother testified that her boys were faithful Christians and had chosen the right way. It was all very impressive.

When the service was over, Jesse took José and his family back to Estima. I returned to Songo with Kelly and some other visitors. Since he had forgotten to give us the keys, we waited outside. When he got there, we could see something was the matter. Jesse, Dennis and some others went straight to the hospital. We found out that a young man had lost his balance on a sharp curve near Estima and fallen off the pickup, hitting his head on the ground.

We cried to God and asked Him to help us during this difficult time. Later on when the men got back from the hospital, they said it hadn't been anything serious and that the young man had gone home.

That night when the missionaries from Tete were getting ready to go, I told Marva, the school teacher, "See you on Monday," because that is when she would be coming this way to begin teaching Jessica. She answered that in Africa it was impossible to make plans. The next several days showed how true that is.

On November 1st, it finally worked out for me to move into the other house. I should have moved sooner, but because of all the goings-on during the last few weeks, it didn't work out.

This house had two bedrooms, a bath and one large living room that was used for

our services. We had to give it a real cleaning. I have never in my life seen so many cockroaches. We killed as many as we could. The house was about two kilometers from Jesse Goucher's house. This was the first time I had ever slept alone in a house. The ceiling was made of Styrofoam sheets, full of holes large enough for cock roaches to come tumbling through. I don't know if it was rats or roaches, but whatever it was they made a most disturbing noise when I was trying to sleep. I crawled under my mosquito net and tried to get some rest.

Dennis didn't bring Marva on Monday because she was sick. She came on Wednesday. That night when it was time to go to my sleeping quarters, Jesse and his family took me in their car. They came in for a bit and when Jessica looked into my bedroom she cried out in pain. A scorpion had stung her.

We quickly took her—and the scorpion—to the hospital. We didn't know how dangerous this could be. When we got to the hospital we were informed the doctor was out, so we went to his house. He prescribed a shot. At the hospital we discovered that the pharmacy was closed. So we hunted up the pharmacist who lived a short distance from the hospital. He told us they were out of the shot we wanted, all he had was pills. So we head back to the doctor's house to see what we should do. He said we should give her a number of pills and it would have the same effect. Carolyn didn't even want to go into that hospital because of the unpleasant memories from when Jesse spent some time there.

On Friday, the 11th, we went to Tete to do our shopping. We got to Dennis Toew's place and the first thing Jesse had to do was take him to the hospital. He was running a fever and felt all washed out. It was night before we returned to Songo.

The mason whom we hired stayed on his drinking binge and seldom showed up for work, but finally he finished his part. Now all we needed were the windows and doors that a carpenter in Tete was supposed to be making. He ended up being a real pain in the neck too. He simply didn't get them made. Occasionally he would call and tell us that the fifty percent down payment wasn't enough.

Today, Sunday the 6th, Jesse knocked on my door early in the morning and said he needed me urgently. His kidneys were acting up again. I could hardly believe it. "Oh, no!" I thought. "Are we going to have a replay of the first time?" Jesse & Carolyn and I went to the doctor's house. We knocked, but no one answered the door. We went home and called him on the phone. He told us he would meet us at the hospital. That's what we did, where we waited and prayed in the car. Jesse was almost beside himself with pain. We wanted the doctor to at least give him a pain killer so that we could take him by car to Zimbabwe. After waiting for over three hours for the doctor to show up, we talked with someone else in the hospital. He came up with a pain killer that he said wasn't the best, but should help. As soon as he had taken the shot, they set out for Zimbabwe. I stayed to take care of things at home. They took a male nurse along who was to give Jesse additional shots as he needed them. By the time they got to Zimbabwe he was feeling better. He eliminated the stone and the next day they came home.

On the 11th I went to Tete on a chuck full machimbombo—bus. Dennis and I

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helped the locals fix up the church in Chimadzi, which is a section of Tete. It's tiring to work all day under a scorching sun in 40°C (104°F) heat. I returned to Songo on the 13th and Dennis & Tina went to Malawi for a baptism. He had hoped to come right back, but he wasn't feeling well when he left. Over there he got to feeling worse and ended up in the hospital, where he had minor surgery. In the end he was gone from home for nearly two weeks.

On the 17th Jessica finally started going to school. The classroom was her teacher's bedroom.

My return date to Brazil was set for January (98). I was seriously considering extending my stay in Mozambique since the missionary still didn't know enough of the language to get along alone. With so much going on, he hadn't had enough time to study Portuguese. At the same time it seems things weren't opening up for me to stay. Then we were able to have classes on a more regular schedule and Jesse made some good progress in his studies. I remember so well the day we had a service in Maroeira. When he got up to open the service, both João and I got up to interpret. But here Jesse began speaking in Portuguese instead of English. What a surprise! I couldn't help but smile the entire time that he talked.

We hired another carpenter to make our windows and doors. He didn't get the job done on the due date, but at least he finally got the work done.

Christmas season in Mozambique has no resemblance to this season of the year in N America. New years celebrations are quite wild. I spent the night of December 31 at Jesse's place. Our neighbors were having a real party. Some time before they had put ground corn in a barrel to ferment. The result is a drink called pombe. They would drink the stuff and then dance to the most monotonous music imaginable. Just to listen gave one a strange feeling. As midnight neared, they began hollering like a bunch of wild animals. We weren't able to sleep that night because of all the noise.

On the 2nd of January we had our first member's meeting in Mozambique. It was a very special time during which we opened our hearts to each other.

On the 4th I went to Tete to spend a few days with Dennis & Tena Toews. We worked on the church. Together with Samuel we visited a widow in Angônia, a beautiful region a two hours drive from there. We had a service under some trees. There were some 15 who came to the service. They seemed to be very anxious to learn more about God. It was a blessing to be able to tell these pagans about the true God of heaven, and at the same time be able to see nature all around us. After the service we had a doctrine class with Vitória, who is one of the converts.

Samuel wants to plant a small mashamba—field—in Angônia. He has a small business in town, but he feels that it would be helpful to raise his own food. It is very common for people who live in town to have a mashamba. Unfortunately, all too often the men laze around while their wives do the work.

On the 15th I had my suitcases packed, ready to return to Brazil. It wasn't easy to tell the Gouchers good-bye. You can imagine how hard it was to leave such a dear family.

I said farewell to the Toews family and headed out to Malawi. I had to say adeus to Mozambique—until who knows when...

I had problems at the Malawi border. I didn't know I needed an entrance visa. The Americans went back and forth without any, but officials give Brazilians different treatment. They said I would have to go back to Maputo to apply for a visa and that it would take a month to come through. Calvin talked to the head official and showed him my ticket. He softened up and called his superior in Blantyre. Soon everything was solved. Thanks to God, I had a good trip back to Brazil, arriving here on the 19th of January. ▲

When Eduardo gave his report here on the Colony I soon came to the conclusion that being a missionary in Africa is no small thing. It takes some real dedication and faith in God. For many of you who have never heard a sermon preached through an interpreter, it's hard to imagine what it would be like to go through two of them. Imagine how cumbersome it would be to have a conversation with a convert through two interpreters.

What the missionaries in Mozambique are experiencing makes our beginning in Brazil look mighty tame. May we remember these brave souls in our prayers.

## Remembering Out Loud

by Sylvia Baize

### **My First Home**

Brazil was my home until I was 18. I was born in Rio Verde, Goiás.

The first house I lived in was a log house with dirt floors, set in the midst of many different kinds of trees. The house was plain enough, but I must have loved it because I used to think heaven had to be an awful lot like the kitchen when the sun was shining across the floor.

There was the constant sound of running water. Since we lived near a stream, water had been channeled out right up to our house, where it flowed into a bica (pronounced: bee-ka). A bica is usually a long hollowed out log laid in such a way as to be waist high to an adult. Some people call it a 20 foot (or however long it happens to be) kitchen sink. It's where dishes and clothes are washed, fruit and vegetables are peeled, etc. At the end the water drops down into a big tub, making it the ideal place to have water fights and take baths. From there the water runs back into the stream.

Our bica was a concrete trough and at the end the water ran into a water wheel that pumped water to a tank up the hill a ways.

What we children really enjoyed was the enormous orchard. We had a number of different varieties of mango trees, cashew trees, a cajamanga tree that bore a sour fruit with a prickly core, a genipapo tree which had softball size fruit that had a doughy texture and



didn't taste especially good. We had a number of goiaba and tamarind trees. Our jaboticaba trees were a special treat. The fruit, that looks like a large black marble, grows right on the trunk of the tree and the larger branches. We would put a jaboticaba in our mouth, pop the skin off and eat the sweet inside. We had the option of spitting out the seeds. When the trees began to bear, we had to eat the fruit toward the bottom first so we could climb up to the rest. Otherwise we would knock them off when we tried to climb the tree.

Down toward the stream where the ground began to get marshy, we had another tree that grew a pretty pink fruit that resembled a peach, except that it had a smooth skin and was firmer. It smelled like a rose and sort of tasted like it too.

We had a loquat tree that bore yellow thumb sized fruit that had a fuzzy skin. And of course, there were orange, lemon and tangerine trees of all different varieties. It was a special time when a banana tree would be cut down and a huge hanger of bananas brought to the pantry to ripen.

For shade trees we had an enormous rubber tree and some Chinaberry trees.

The leafy yard with its mixture of trees scattered every way you looked was an enchanted, cool, green world. We children didn't need a playhouse with a natural one under the spreading mango trees. With all the low hanging branches we didn't need monkey bars. We didn't need a swimming pool with a natural pool in the stream, or for a quick refresher, to jump into the tub under the bica.

I was born into a family of three sisters and two brothers, by age: Denise, Sandy, Carlos, Yolanda and Lucas. When I was a year and a half, Yolanda, then nine, was struck by lightning while playing under a tree and instantly killed. I don't remember her.

My folks adopted Denise, Sandy and Lucas, all from the same family. When I was 7 years old, they adopted Otávio. When I was 17, Janete, a cousin to Denise, Sandy and Lucas, came to live with us. She had just gotten converted under Isaac Akinyombo's preaching. She lived with us until she got married and to me is another sister.

Through my growing up years it seems that at least 85 percent of the time we had someone living in with us, sometimes for a few weeks, sometimes for months, or even years. It feels as though I grew up in a large family.

My parents moved from Kansas to Brazil in 69. That is why I found myself breathing good Brazilian air when I took my first breath in 76.

When I was three years old we built a new brick house near the old wood house. In the beginning, to get from the bedrooms to the living area, we had to cross a small open porch. I was always afraid something would jump out at me when I crossed the porch at night.

Going up the hill a little ways, we had a barn and a corral. I spent many hours there watching the "rodeos" when the men worked the cattle.

We had two horses, Whitie and Pretinho (Blacky). I would ride Whitie and Lucas would ride Pretinho. Whitie was a nice gentle horse and minded me quite well. The few times I did fall off of a horse, it was off of Pretinho. He had an attitude if a horse ever did, so I claimed Whitie as mine.

We would often get on our horses and ride up to our gravel pit. Actually, it wasn't a

pit at all, but a hill of gravel with hardly any trees growing on it. To get to the gravel pit, we had to go around a deep washout, which we called the canyon. Some days we would play in the canyon. We would cut steps into the soft walls and then climb up and down. It made a good shortcut.

In the middle of the canyon there were high mounds of dirt that the water hadn't managed to wash away. Once a boy was messing around on one and it crumbled down on him. Others dug him out and he wasn't injured, but even so we kept our distance from those mounds.

My mom would fix us some tuna sandwiches and we would have a picnic in the canyon on a nice sunny day. Or we would take our horses and ride way out to some shady woods and have our lunch there.

One day we got on our horses and took off for Clifford Warkentin's place. They lived a little over a mile from us. We came up out of the woods, then through the gate, and for some reason decided to ride through the field instead of going on the road.

There was a tumble down fence between us and the road. When we got to a place where the wires had all fallen to the ground, we tried to get our horses to go back onto the road. They wouldn't budge. We tried again and again, but couldn't get them to go. So Lucas got down and looked on the ground and there was a poisonous snake in the tall grass. We killed it and after that we got the horses across. We took the snake all the way to Cliffords so they could see it. I don't remember what kind it was, but I do know that it was poisonous.

To be continued

*(As some of you readers know, Sylvia is our youngest daughter.)*

## The Crisis

# The Shock Heard Round the World

When inflation was lowered from two percent per day to two percent per year (1.7% last year), there was general applause. It was believed that inflation was the cause of Brazil's many economic woes and that from now on everyone would live happily ever after. But it wasn't to be so.

The Asian crisis proved that Brazil's economic problems were not yet buried six feet under the sod. So did the Russian crisis. Then came the more recent crisis during which more than 40 billion dollars of monetary reserves flew the coup on the wings of disgruntled investors.

When the World Monetary Fund stepped in with a mammoth emergency loan, once again it appeared that Brazil would squeeze through by the skin of the teeth. Then came one of those totally unexpected blows more suited to a soap opera than to a nation of 150 billion souls.

President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's predecessor, Itamar Franco, is now the

governor of the prosperous state of Minas Gerais. Famous for his unconventional behavior, Franco managed, with a dramatic announcement, to send shudders through the international stock market—and place Brazil in the vortex of an economic maelstrom.

When Franco was chosen to be Fernando Collor's running mate in the 1990 presidential election, it was a political maneuver, not intended to get the best man, but the most votes.

After having served more or less half of his term, President Collor was impeached and Itamar Franco became president. Doubtlessly his most important act as president was to invite Fernando Henrique Cardoso to be his Minister of Finances. (According to the Financial Times, it was his only noteworthy decision.) It was Fernando Henrique Cardoso who restructured Brazil's monetary system, burying the moribund cruzeiro and becoming the progenitor of the real, the new currency. In doing so he tamed the inflationary tiger. The credit for all this went to the Minister of Finances and not to the Presidente da República, something which Itamar Franco never forgot, nor forgave.

On January 1, the same day that Fernando Henrique Cardoso was sworn in for a second term as president, Itamar Franco took oath as the governor of the state of Minas Gerais. The stage was now set for vengeance.

Days after taking office, Franco declared a 90 day moratorium on all debts held with the federal government. Since the debt had recently been renegotiated with a low interest rate and 30 years to pay, cries of foul were heard at all levels.

But it worked. Already jittery investors began packing their bags—with money—and leaving the country. In less than 48 hours two billion dollars skipped the country. What was their reasoning? If Minas Gerais, a prosperous state with a former president as governor, could pull such a stunt, why couldn't the rest of the states follow suit?

A moratorium is the temporary suspension of debt payments—according to the dictionary, and the debtor. To the creditor it means, “The guy's very likely not going to pay.”

Let's notice what the press is saying about the crisis. We will begin with Exame Magazine. The question asked is if Brazil will survive.

“Yes, [Brazil] will survive—if, as of right now the government and politicians will face, once and for all, the breakdown of its public finances. No, [Brazil] will not survive—if things continue as they are. It's simple. Forget about international speculators, about Russia, about the neurasthenia of the markets. Even forget Itamar Franco. Brazil was, is, and will continue to be vulnerable to tempests of this kind because it's a second class economy. It's a second class economy because its public expenses are totally incompatible with what it produces, and moreover, with its ability to finance this kind of spending. This is the main reason for its woes. Until a few years ago this deficit spending was taken care of by printing more money and fabricating inflation. Since 1994 the real has been anchored to the dollar with an insane interest rate—which finally was dropped. At any rate, the end result is the same: economies that are constantly insolvent because they spend more than they are able, will always end up being punished.”

Until recently we here on the Colony were spectators in this crisis. We kept our fingers crossed and hoped the storm would blow over without taking any roofs off. But then one day several weeks ago headlines blared out the news: The exchange rate which had been held artificially low for the last five years had been released and could fluctuate without any controls. The shock waves hit the Colony about as hard as anyplace.

You may have noticed in the last issue of BN that one dollar would buy 1.21 reals. Today it is 2.07. (No telling what it will be tomorrow.) Let's make a few practical applications to see why the earth trembled on the Colony.

Farm equipment was frequently financed on the dollar, but payable in reals, with a low interest rate. A farmer who financed 10,000 dollars when the exchange rate was 1.20 was owing R\$12,000. Now, several weeks later on the new exchange rate, it takes R\$20,700 to pay the same debt.

On the other hand, someone who made a debt in reals will pay no extra and when he goes to sell his soybeans should get good increase, since the price is directly influenced by the dollar. The increase on corn will be considerably less, or even nil. So while some farmers will be hanging their harps on the willows, others will be furiously strumming away at them.

Someone who had 15,000 reals stashed away for a trip to N America suddenly discovers it will now take over 25,000 reals for the same trip.

Let's say you want to invest 100,000 reals in real estate here. That would have been 82,000 dollars. But now you can buy the same tract of land for a bit over 48,000 bucks.

On the other hand, let's say you plan on selling a tract of land in Brazil worth 100,000 reals. Instead of looking at 82,000 greenbacks, it's only 48,000 now.

Some of the comparisons are fictitious since the price is in reals (and may not change) and we pay in reals. Even so it makes a person feel sort of good to know that we were paying 67 US cents per minute for a call to N America. Now it's only 39 US cents. But there's no point in going on a calling binge since, for all practical purposes, it's just as expensive as it's ever been.

Now remember, by the time you read this, the situation will doubtlessly have taken another big change. We hope so. The government knew that the real was worth too much and was hoping it would stabilize in the neighborhood of 1.50 – 1.60, which would have been a very realistic figure. There is still hope that once the novelty of the thing wears off, the exchange rate will work itself back to something more reasonable. If it should happen to stay around 2.0, a lot of things will be upset, including the near zero inflation. At 2.0 it is estimated there will be 10% inflation for 1999. After the hyperinflation we have had, that doesn't sound too bad, but compared with modern economies, it's deplorable.

What will it take to straighten things out? It will take a Congress that places national interests before personal interests. The time bomb that has begun to explode is the government retirement plan. Let's listen to what Exame has to say:

Even a ten year old is able to understand why the retirement plan for government

workers, which is now being discussed in Congress, makes it impossible to balance the budget without major surgery. Needless to say, this isn't the only thing that is creating a deficit, but it is emblematic of Brazil's tragic public spending. Let's notice:

- In 1997 the federal government paid out 19.5 billion reals in retirement benefits to 905,000 retired government workers. In the private sector there are a total of 17.7 million retirees, or about 20 times more than that of government workers. These 17.7 million retirees received only 49.4 billion reals in benefits, or 2.5 times more than the 905,000 government workers got.

- A retiree from the private sector gets an average of R\$250 a month in retirement benefits. A retired civil servant gets an average of R\$1,800. Retirees from the judicial branch get around R\$4,800, and from the legislative branch, R\$6,900.

Oddly, it's the worker's party, that is supposed to be looking after the underdog, that is against any reforms.

That's a dark picture, but Exame shows the other side of the coin too:

- Inflation has been brought under control. For the first time in recent history we are going through a major crisis without prices skyrocketing, even though there are no controls.

- The Brazilian economy is more competitive. Brazil no longer has a closed economy like it did in former crises. Today it is demand that to a large extent is determining the price of products being marketed.

- The World Monetary Fund is giving long term help, not just emergency room treatment.

- The banking system was overhauled. State banks which before operated like virtual mints [dishing out money to corrupt politicians], have all but ceased to exist.

- The president of Brazil is FHC. Never has Brazil had a president better prepared to handle a crisis than Fernando Henrique Cardoso. He is implementing a long range plan and has four years ahead of him to make things work.

- A national conscience is developing on public spending. Even though reforms are meeting a tremendous resistance, a conscience is definitely developing. Just a short time ago public deficit was an abstract idea. Today it is something real that is translating into new laws that will actually change things.

Without a doubt we are in a very serious crisis. The shock waves are being felt here on the Colony. So, are people all panicky? No. The uncertainties make for apprehensions, which is very normal. But the dust hasn't settled yet. Things could get worse. And they may get better. At any rate I haven't heard any talk of a mass exodus. Of course, with the exchange rate the way it is, it's really a bad time to get out. So folks, come visit us. Your dollars will go a long ways once you get here. Who knows, you might even decide to buy some land. At half price it might not be too bad a deal. ▲

## This & That

Since this column got shunted to a siding last month, we will begin with December news.

Stephen Kramer spent several weeks in Mato Grosso helping his brothers get their crops in.

Arlo & Priscilla Hibner spent several days on the Mirassol, São Paulo mission at the beginning of the month.

Dec. 7–15 Ministers Mark Loewen and Arlo Hibner visited the Patos and Acaraú missions in the Northeast.

Gene & Mary Beth Koepl and family spent over a month here. It's hardly fair to just make a quick note of this happening. It ought to be an article. You see, Gene & Mary Beth grew up here, got married here and started their family here. About 10 years ago they moved back to the US. They took with them a truckload of memories. Gene used to do some trucking here in Brazil. He knows more about what is where in this country than a lot of Brazilians. I was telling him about the Casa Grande Hotel we stayed in on the coast out beyond São Paulo quite a few years ago. "Oh yes," he said, "It's beside that big hill. I know the place" Anyway, I suspect they enjoyed themselves here and we certainly enjoyed having them here. In fact, I believe that sooner or later they'll be back. The welcome mat is already rolled out for them. Here on the Colony, not at the Casa Grande Hotel.

Harold Dirks was here from Dec. 2 – 14. We missed Emma and Greta, who didn't come along this time. Harold was one of the first to move here and took the brunt of the pioneering pains. The Colony always feels more complete when he is here.

On Dec. 17 the Monte Alegre School had its Christmas program. On the 22nd the Rio Verdinho School had its program.

Some were out from Mato Grosso for Christmas and the Annual Meeting on Jan. 1.

The General Annual Meeting for the church in Brazil was held at the Monte Alegre Congregation this year. The afternoon session is dedicated to business. The topic for the evening meeting was "Culture." The interesting conclusion to the matter was that we enjoy being around someone of another culture. When there are problems, it's not because the cultures are different, but because love isn't perfect. It's a rather painful diagnosis, but so much truth to it. This annual meeting, usually held on Jan. 1, is becoming a highlight on the Colony calendar.

On Jan. 2 Ministers Dennis Koehn and Wayne Amoth arrived to give us the peace lectures that I believe are being given in N America too. On the evenings of the 3rd and 4th they gave their lectures on the Colony for all three congregations. Then they went to the Boa Esperança Congregation in Mato Grosso and from there to the Pirenópolis Congregation. Different ones on the Colony testified that these lectures were an introduction to the revival meetings that followed.

On Jan. 4 there was an all day general school board/teacher's meeting at the Monte Alegre School.

## Brazil <sup>15</sup> News

On Jan. 5, we got a new neighbor. Amberly Rose, Milton & Cindy Loewen's little girl. We hope she will enjoy the neighborhood.

Also on Jan 5, Gene Koepls and a bunch from the Colony and town went to Mato Grosso for a visit.

On Jan. 6 revival meetings began at the Monte Alegre Cong. The evangelists were Harold Eck and Stanley Wiggers. Leon Keohn also was here.

Roberto Amorim and son Thiago from Curitiba were here for part of the meetings. He is doing very well and is anxiously awaiting the day when there will be missionaries stationed in Curitiba.

Monte & Rhoda Unruh were here to visit her sister Sandra, Mrs. Milferd Loewen.

Ray & Gwendene Schmidt and dau. Brenda were here to visit Elizabeth who is teaching at the Rio Verdinho School. Rays are Elizabeth's folks. Her grandpa Willard Holdeman was here too. Howard & Pauline Holdeman were in the same group. They all have relatives galore here.

Ike & Rosalie Loewen were here for a short visit. They brought Rhonda Classen and three children along. Ike & Rosalie are old-timers from here and always brighten things up when they come.

The big news from the Rio Verde Congregation is that they are going to get their own school going right directly. Laura Costa, who has been teaching on the Colony, will be their teacher. Classes will be held at one end of the church social hall. It has taken a lot of work to get everything ready, but between the brethren in town and some help from the Colony, things are shaping up. More on this project once it is underway.

Don & Rosie Millsap and Harold & Vada Schmidt came to hold meetings at the Rio Verdinho Congregation, which began on Jan. 22.

Mark Loewen is in Belleville, Pennsylvania holding meetings and Arlo Hibner in Plainsview, Kansas.

Myron Unruhs and Milferd Loewens rented a van with driver to take Montes to plane in São Paulo. They visited Iguazu Falls, Paraguay and Curitiba before heading to the airport.

Both corn and soybean harvest is just beginning. In spite of the fact that our rainfall has been well below average, it looks like the harvest will be about normal. The rains were spaced just right to where the crops didn't suffer very much.

As visitors who have been here can tell you, the first 80 km of highway out of Rio Verde, going toward Goiânia is absolutely shot. It resembles the surface of the moon. And it is very, very dangerous. I understand they are filling in the worst holes.