

# Brazil News

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Editorial

## **A Leper Gives Thanks**

I was but a lad of 15 when the first symptom appeared. Up to this point my life had been most normal.

I loved and was loved in the home. My family was a special treasure to me.

Oh, how I loved the evening, when Dad and I would walk home together from work. As we neared home, we would smell supper through the open door.

We would eat supper, and then sit around talking.

What a beautiful time in my life, together with Dad and Mom, my brothers and sisters. A time of carefree innocence.

I would have liked for this time to go on forever.

Like I said, I was 15 when the first symptom appeared. It started out as just a tiny discolored spot on my left hand.

Right in the beginning it didn't occur to me that it might be anything serious.

But it didn't go away like an ordinary sore and I began to worry. I could hardly sleep at night for worry.

Soon I was in the habit of walking with the back of my hand toward my leg so that no one would see my sore.

I guess that is the main reason my Mom noticed it.

She took one look and I thought she looked like she was about to faint. In a low voice she asked me how long I had had this sore.

I told her.

She didn't say anymore, but that night when everyone was in bed, I heard her and Dad talking in a very low voice. I'm almost sure she was sobbing.

The next morning Dad didn't get ready to go to work as usual. He and Mom called me aside and said they hoped my little sore wasn't anything, but that we would have to go see the priest.

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I had seen the priest a number of times before when we went to offer sacrifices. But this time it was different. When Dad told him why we had come, he looked even more solemn than usual.

Real kindly he looked at me and said,  
“I’d like to see your hand, son.”

I held out my hand and he looked at it carefully. Then he carefully examined me all over and finally came back to my hand.

After quite a while he called my folks aside.

I guess he forgot that a 15 year old has better ears than someone 65 years old.

Anyway, I got snatches of what he said:

“...just a small splotch, but you will notice that the hairs are white right to the root.”

“...So he’s only 15? How unfortunate!”

“No, there’s no doubt, it’s leprosy.”

As we walked home, no one said anything. Then as we got right near home, I got up the nerve to ask,

“Dad, will I... Will I...”

(I couldn’t bring myself to say it)

We stopped and I saw Dad’s eyes were full of tears. Reading my thoughts, he answered in a broken voice,

“Yes, son, you will have to leave.....home.”

They say that leprosy is a type of sin, because it separates us from that which we need and love the most. It takes us from out of our home and puts us into a different world – a cold world.

When you have leprosy, there is no good place to go.

My Dad tried to check around to find a place that might be more suitable for me to stay. But it soon became evident that there is no suitable place for lepers.

No matter where you go, you are far from your home and family. You must leave those you love. You can no longer enjoy the comforts of life. You must live in a world in which everyone is slowly decaying away. There are no luxuries where lepers live. Every time someone happens to come near who isn’t a leper, you must, in a loud voice cry,

Unclean! Unclean!

My first day with the lepers, living without the city gates was a most awful nightmare.

I looked at myself – almost whole – just a small splotch on my hand, and then looked at the mutilated bodies around me.

I would look at my slightly splotched hand and then at the necrotic, fingerless hands of my fellows, and then wonder:

Will I someday look like that too?

All too soon I found out.

That splotch didn’t remain a splotch very long. The skin on most of my body was soon off-color.

Then one day I noticed something was the matter with my finger and toe nails. Sores began to develop beneath them.

As these sores worsened, one by one I lost my nails.

They say that when you have leprosy your fingers and toes fall off.

That's not true.

Slowly, over a period of years, this terrible disease destroys vital tissue. Ulcerated sores slowly eat up the fingers. The cartilage in your nose is slowly eaten up and your nose sinks in until in its place there is a most terrible depression.

Blindness is common.

There is a lot of pain, although the decaying process also destroys nerve endings. This means that the extremities often become insensitive, anesthetized.

Many times this results in burns. You go to arrange the wood in the fire and the first thing you know you get too close to the fire and burn the end of your stump hand.

When you live with lepers without the gate you have a lot of time to think. Nobody talks much. You just don't feel like it. Each day you look at yourself and know that you're slowly dying.

Some lepers make it fifteen, twenty maybe up to thirty years after they get the sickness.

Leprosy isn't satisfied with your extremities, though. Eventually it gets into your throat. It creates some awful nodes that choke you to death.

Yes, it's a terrible sickness!

They say it's symbolic of sin.

I have often wondered, does sin really eat on our soul like leprosy does on our body?

Does it eat up the tender nerves in our conscience to where we can step in the fire and not feel it?

Does it separate us from our loved ones and put us outside the city gate?

Does it eat up our virtues and leave in their place miserable sores, like leprosy does?

Does it make us die and die and die, and then finally choke us to death, like leprosy?

Twenty years went by after I saw the priest. I was a terrible sight. If someone happened to come by and I didn't have a chance to call

Unclean! Unclean!

before he saw me, he would take one terror stricken look at me and turn tail and run.

There wasn't much left of me, and worse, there were some nodules forming in my throat.

I knew my time was about up.

One day a rumor swept the camp about a man by the name of Jesus. It was said he could heal any type of sickness. They said he healed the cripples, gave sight to the blind and made the dumb to speak.

We discussed it for awhile and then someone summed it up like this:

"Maybe this Jesus can get someone to see or to talk, because they still have their eyes and tongue. He fixes them. But we . . ."

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(and here he lifted up handless arms and motioned to his footless legs)

“...we don’t have anything left to fix. In our case He’d have to re-create us. He’d have to make us whole!”

Soon most everyone dismissed this Jesus as just another rumor.

But for some reason I couldn’t forget him. I wondered, “Could He really make me whole?”

Then one day our camp really came alive.

Jesus, it was reported, was in the vicinity of Samaria and Galilee and was coming to our village.

There were quite a few skeptics among us, but finally I said,

“Look fellows, what do we have to lose? Let’s go out to the city gate and see if He can do something for us. If he can’t, what have we lost? We’re dead men anyway.”

Let me tell you what happened.

We hobbled or crawled, ten of us, to the city gate. We really weren’t supposed to be this close to the city, but we decided we would risk it this once. There was really nothing they could do with us.

I didn’t know who this Jesus was, for I had never seen him. I didn’t know how we would recognize Him.

It turned out that that was no problem. As people came to the city, they invariably screwed up their faces and looked away.

But when Jesus came it was different. He looked right at us and when we called out, “Jesus, Master, take pity on us!

He simply said,

“Go show yourselves to the priest.”

That’s all.

Then He walked on.

We looked at each other.

“Let’s go back to camp,”

one of the men said.

“That’s about what I expected,”

another one said. But I said,

“Aw come on fellows. We’ve come this far . . .”

Would you believe that after we took several steps, our skin began to change color?

Our fingers and toes began to grow.

I reached up and felt my nose. It was no longer a hole in my face. I could breath right again.

And then I realized that

I was whole!

My buddies went wild with joy and took out running to the priest, to be declared clean.

I did to, but all of a sudden I stopped. I looked at myself. My skin looked like it did

20 years ago. That was wonderful, but something much more wonderful began taking shape in my mind.

Now I could go home!

Home! What a blessed thought! I would no longer be shunned!

Again I began running – this time in the direction of home.

But once more I stopped . . .

You don't receive a gift like this and then just run off.

I took out running in the direction where I last saw Jesus.

When I caught up with Him, I simply threw myself down at His feet and thanked Him from the bottom of my heart for making me whole. I worshiped Him.

He looked at me and asked,

“You were ten of you, weren't you?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Where are the other nine?”

“Lord, I don't know,” I said. “I think they went to see the priest.”

Looking around He commented,

“Strange, that just this Samaritan should come back and thank me.”

He looked very severe when He said this, but then He gave me the most wonderful smile and said,

Go in peace, your faith has made you whole!

When He said this my spiritual eyes were opened and I saw that when Jesus restored my decayed limbs, that was His great power.

But when He restored my leprous soul, that was His Grace and Mercy.

Yes, now I could go home. My filthy garments were replaced by a robe of righteousness.

I was clean! ▲

## A Brazilian Story

Mário de Moraes

### **A Supernatural Repairman**

Zezinho Marcondes was the mayor of the municipality of Guararema, in the state of São Paulo when all this happened. He told the story to Manoel Hernandez, who later on retold it to me, just like he heard it:

As you know, Manoel, I have a house in Caraguatatuba. It happens I had a refrigerator here at home that was just sitting around, so I decided to take it to my other house. But when I got there and plugged it in, the thing wouldn't work right.

So far as cooling, it would cool just a little, but it wouldn't freeze ice for anything. I had two different repairmen come out to look at it, but they couldn't find the problem.

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Then someone told me about a repairman from Mogi das Cruzes who can fix any refrigerator, no matter what the problem is. So I went to Mogi das Cruzes to talk to the man. I told him the whole story and offered to take him to my place so he could fix the fridge. But he wouldn't hear of it. First of all he was too busy, and then it might be so expensive to where it wouldn't pay to fix the fridge.

"I have a better idea," he told me. I asked him what it was and the old gentleman informed me that he would fix my fridge telepathically. "Return to Caraguatatuba and call me as soon as you get there. We will then set the exact time when I will fix your fridge through the powers of telepathy. You can be absolutely positive that I can fix it from right here in Mogi das Cruzes."

I thought he was pulling my leg and I left his shop really put out. It happens I'm not much on religion and I don't believe in anything supernatural. Before I left I made one last try, "I don't see any way but for you to go with me."

"In that case your fridge won't get fixed," he retorted, "because I won't go." Seeing I was really out of sorts, he handed me his business card. "That's my phone number. If you decide to take me up, call me. I'll fix your fridge and you won't have to pay me anything. Just send me a jug of wine some time."

Another two months went by. I don't know how many other repairmen I called out, but the thing plain refused to work. Swallowing my pride, I decided to try a supernatural repair job. I called the repairman in Mogi das Cruzes. He answered the phone and immediately gave the necessary instructions: "Today, Friday, at exactly five o'clock, put a folded comforter right in the middle of the dining room floor. Place the refrigerator on its side on top of the comforter. Place a lighted candle at either end of the fridge. After exactly 15 minutes say the Lord's Prayer three times and recite one Hail Mary. After your have said your prayers, set the fridge upright and it will work. It's very important that you plug it in at 5:45, because I'll be saying my Hail Marys here in Mogi das Cruzes at that exact time."

I considered that to be about the biggest stupidity I had ever heard in my life, but I went ahead and did it anyway. Would you believe that when I plugged the fridge in, it worked!

My wife, who believes in supernatural happenings, took advantage of the situation and really raked me over the coals. "See there, you infidel. Can you see that the spirits really do have power?" I told some of my buddies about what had happened and they said they had heard of similar experiences.

Quite some time later I was driving through Mogi das Cruzes. I stopped at the repairman's shop to give him his jug of wine. He got the biggest kick out of it all. He told me it was one big joke, and then went on to give a technical explanation for his joke: "It almost always works. These fridges have freon gas in them. When a fridge sits around for awhile, the gas settles to the bottom. When you place it in a horizontal position, the gas is able to circulate again – and produces a miracle." ▲

## Remembering Out Loud

### **Practical Dentists**

That is the rather nice sounding name that has been given to dentists in this country who haven't been to dental school, and consequently practice illegally.

When we moved to Brazil some 25 years ago, there were probably more practical dentists in town than certified ones. And because of the shortage of certified dentists, these falsos dentistas were tolerated quite well. Their clientele included not only the poor, but also the middle and professional classes.

When we lived in town, where I gave English classes, shortly after moving to Brazil, we had a neighbor who was a practical dentist. We learned to know him quite well and for a number of years he was our dentist.

My first class was at six in the morning, so around 5:30 I would run downtown on my bike to pick up some hot bread fresh out of the oven. By then he would many times be off to work, where there might easily be a dozen people waiting out in the dark.

Altamiro seldom had his office at the same place for more than six months or a year. No matter how many times he moved, his patients patiently followed him from place to place, actually, from backyard to backyard, because he usually rented a couple of rooms in people's backyards.

There was never anything fancy about these rooms. In fact, there was nothing fancy about anything. The chair was an old canvas, Army dental chair. I doubt if he had over a dozen instruments. Of these, the little mirror and the little hooked instrument (whatever it's called), never got sterilized. After each patient, he would wash his hands, hanging on to these instruments.

The drill was the old slow motion prehistoric type with the long, long belt that would sound like a bumble bee stuck in molasses. The kind you used to have there too. Instruments used for pulling teeth he would boil. X-ray? No way.

Someone coming to Altamiro's office at nine or ten o'clock in the morning would probably find between 20 to 30 already in line. He normally took care of 50 to 60 patients a day.

By now you are probably convinced that anyone who would go to a dentist like this probably had more wrong in his head than just holes in his teeth.

Please read on.

People used to go to dentists like Altamiro for two reasons. First of all, because they didn't have money to go to a regular dentist, and then, after learning to know him, because they liked his work.

To begin with the time spent in the waiting room wasn't all that bad especially for the women. It was a fabulous place to pick up new crochet or knitting stitches, to exchange recipes, or to plain make new friends.

Altamiro would seldom use anesthesia, except for extractions or root canals, and the

like. When the problem was a cavity, he would very, very gently clean it out just enough so that he could put some medication in. He would repeat this procedure in each cavity and then ask the patient to come back the next day.

The next day he would drill in a bit more, carefully watching for the first sign of pain on his patient. Any flinch, and he would stop and put medication in and go on to the next one. Some could already be filled on the second setting. Others could take up to four or five.

Altamiro, like I'm sure many of his counterparts, was able to handle all routine dental work, including bridges, dentures, root canals and caps. So far as the quality of his work, it was excellent. I had a root canal done some 20 years ago which has never given me any trouble. Others have gone to practical dentists here and later had dentists in the States look at the work done. These dentists have been positively amazed at the quality of the work especially when taken into consideration that it was done without X-rays or any other modern equipment.

So far as their actual work, these dentists have one serious drawback. Since their prices will usually be only about twenty percent of what a licensed dentist charges, they must buy inferior supplies. Fillings quite often crumble in a short time, not because of shoddy workmanship, but because the materials used were of no account.

Practical dentists today are a species in extinction. This is a natural consequence of civilization. While the Dental Association is adamantly against them (most understandably, now that we have a surplus of licensed dentists), I suspect they are sort of looking the other way in the case of old timers like Altamiro who are due for retirement.

Society owes a lot to these dentistas práticos. There was a time when they filled a real need. Even though we have been going to a licensed dentist for almost 20 years, I am glad to have had the privilege of going to a dentista práctico for a few years. ▲

## A Charlatan?

Unfortunately, when I read this in the paper a number of years ago, I didn't clip the article, so I don't have a lot of details. A neurologist was nabbed by the police for practicing medicine without a license.

Not only was he a very skillful surgeon, but he would attend international workshops and even make speeches on his specialty.

His patients were one disappointed bunch when he had to quit practicing. I never did find out what became of his case. Because of all the good he did, I suspect he got a slap on the wrist and was forced to change professions.

My only question is: Would it be proper to call a man of his caliber a charlatan? ▲



## Healing a Dog

Mário de Moraes' story makes me think of the many charismatic religious groups in which faith healing and speaking in tongues are the big calling cards. I have wondered how much of that is a downright sham.

Back when I had my store and took care of my customer's pets, it wasn't unusual to see up to 15 or more sick animals in one day. Especially when an epidemic would hit town, one would see so many sick animals with the same thing that one quick glance would be enough to come up with an accurate diagnosis (even though for public relations sake one had to go through the motions of examining the animal).

So it was possible to have a little fun once in a while. It would begin when a customer would walk through the door with a dog on a leash.

She: Boa tarde. My dog is sick.

Me: Boa tarde. I see it is. What's its name?

She: Capitão.

Me: OK, here is what happened. The day before yesterday Capitão became listless and refused to eat. Yesterday he began to vomit (I would go into a detailed explanation on the texture and odor of the vomit) and have diarrhea (another detailed explanation). Today Capitão didn't even want to get up anymore. He just lies huddled in a corner...

By now the lady would be wondering what kind of a prophetic vet she had come to see anyway, that could tell her the medical history of her hound without having ever laid eyes on it before. But like Sherlock would say, "Elementary, my dear Dr. Watson."

But it does prove a point. It isn't nearly as hard to fool others as we sometimes think. ▲

## Brasília

### **Something New in the Air**

Skeptics are saying that the near zero inflation and the strong economy we are enjoying are hot air balloons that will soon run out of gas. They may be right. But there's a fairly good chance they're wrong.

Why?

Because there is something new in the air. For years Brazil's economic problems were blamed on the ills of capitalism, on the old story that the poor are poor because the rich are oppressing them. And that the rich are rich because they oppress the poor. Obviously this possibility exists. However when this becomes a mentality in individuals, races or nationalities, the results are predictable. The rich do become richer and the poor remain poor.

Both socialism and communism were doomed from day one because of this exact mentality. And while Brazil never did go socialist or communist, enough of this thinking was present, not only in the leadership, but also in the general

population, to where people sat around waiting for a miracle when they should have gone to work.

Even big business, the supposed mainstay of capitalism, were contaminated by this thinking. Rather than face competition, they lobby for laws that would stifle or eliminate competition. This was especially true in the case of imports. Outrageously high import taxes, from 40 – 100%, made most imported items a luxury for the few.

Though frequently criticized for his explosive, impulsive nature, President Itamar Franco is doing Brazil more good than most will admit. It is because of his uncompromising, undiplomatic approach to problems that he is able to stare big business down, which he is doing right now.

In a desperate effort to retain the status quo, industry has proposed to the president that they will not raise prices – which after all aren't frozen – if he will maintain the high import taxes. Franco has refused to play ball. Import taxes have been lowered drastically. An attempt on the part of industry to bring the government to its knees by taking their product off the market or hiking the prices, will now be met by a deluge of similar imported goods. That, after all, is capitalism at its finest.

I mentioned that this mentality is damaging to individuals, races and nations. I would like to add, and to the church. Whenever this leaven is permitted to grow, be it in established congregations or on the mission fields, the casualty rate will be high. It cripples or destroys both financially and spiritually.

Brazil has changed tremendously in the last three and a half years, during the Collor and Franco presidencies. Everything indicates it will change some more. ▲

## Life in Brazil

### **Weights and Measures**

In North America you talk about acres and bushels. Here we talk about alqueires and sacos.

It's true we have the hectare here (approximately 2.5 acres), but strangely, this metric measurement is not used everywhere in Brazil. We here still use the alqueire as a land measurement. Known as the "alqueire goiano," (Goiás alqueire) it is equivalent to 12 acres. Some states use the "alqueire paulista," (São Paulo alqueire), which is only 6 acres. Thus between the hectare and two different alqueires, we have three land measurements.

The bushel is totally unknown here. Instead we use the saco (sack) as a basic measurement of grain. Here again there is a bit of confusion. In most places the saco is 60 kilos (132 lbs.). But not always. Sometimes it is only 50 kilos (110 lbs.).

Is it confusion? Not really. Here when someone says his corn made 720 sacks to the alqueire, we immediately know it's a 12 acre alqueire and a 60 kilo sack – and that it did real well.

The tendency is to go over to hectares, the metric measurement. In fact, I think that bank loans use only the metric measurement. ▲

## Renting Farm Ground

Under socialist influence, certain laws were made here in Brazil with the intention of helping the underprivileged. These Robin Hood laws have actually done the poor much more harm than good. Not only have they harmed the poor, but also farmers who today would like to rent land.

These laws, while quite diverse and complex, basically said that anyone who managed to live on someone's land for eight years had a right to some of the land. This, of course, was a disguised form of agrarian reform (and in many cases, outright robbery).

The result of this law was that farmers had a constant turnover of hired men, making sure no one would ever put in the full eight years.

Even though a legal rent contract circumvents the eight year thing, land owners are still leery about having someone on their land for very long. Partly because of this, land contracts are of short duration – usually from one to three years.

Rent is calculated in sacks of grain per alqueire. Since a lot of land is still being built up, it isn't unusual to lower the amount of grain to be paid as rent, but stipulate that so many tonnes of lime must be spread during the duration of the contract.

For land in production, rent can run up to 20% of the total production. In this case the renter pays all expenses except land taxes.

For farmers not to be able to plan very far ahead is obviously a severe handicap. It's one of the things that make colonization so attractive.

And yet the problem isn't quite as serious as it seems. Because Mennonites normally have better than average yields and because land owners know we won't make problems, even if we stay on their land for longer periods, the renting is actually working out quite well. ▲

## Slamming Doors

Quite a few years ago we had an Englishman named Bob Grey living in Rio Verde. When trying to fix something – if a bolt wouldn't turn or something wouldn't budge – he would, in his heavy British accent, dourly remark, "Like the American says, 'Don't force it. Just get a bigger hammer.'" We Americans were supposed to think it was funny.

Maybe it was.

But what isn't funny, at least to a Brazilian, is when an American goes to closing a door – a car door, a house door, a store door.

To a Brazilian, shutting a door is an art. Both children and adults, with few exceptions, shut any door with the same care that a mother uses to shut the bedroom door after putting her child to sleep.

A car door, for example. A Brazilian will carefully bring the door right up to the latch, and then, with a quick, firm tug, close the door. If it doesn't latch properly, he will repeat the operation with just a bit more vigor.

A house door. The accepted Brazilian way to close a house door is to turn the knob so as to retract the plunger, carefully pull the door against the jam, and while holding it thus, release the plunger. Presto. Absolutely no noise and the door is firmly latched.

Enter two Americans.

Engrossed in a deep conversation, two Americans walk side by side. They swing their arms, they gesture, as they make a point. When they approach their car from the rear, they veer apart, one to the left and the other to the right. Arms still waving, the conversation is now carried on over the top of the car.

As the two Americans reach their respective doors, they jerk them open and pile in without the slightest interlude in their conversation.

And then it happens. Each American viciously grabs the armrest on his door and gives a violent tug.

The conversation continues.

BANG! (Only one bang because both doors strike precisely at the same instant.) The whole car trembles.

The conversation continues.

The key is turned, the motor comes to life, and within seconds the car is humming down the road . . .

(“...and like I was saying, once the vet got there and shot some stuff into the cow’s vein, she soon was up on her feet and . . .”)

Just a suggestion to you Americans who visit Brazil. When getting ready to shut your car door, turn to the victim sitting across from you, in the other seat, and say, “Please hang onto your door, I’m about to shut mine.”

On house doors it’s American children who can break all records. The idea seems to be to come running full tilt, jerk the door open and release the handle, let the door hit the wall with a plaster shattering jar, cross the threshold, catch the door handle on the rebound, give a mighty pull, and be half way across the room before the sonic boom hits.

In most cases Brazilians will silently grit their teeth when witnessing these manifestations of American might. One place, however, that it pays to be careful is when riding in a taxi. Most taxi drivers have acquired their car with a lot of hard work and are quite sensitive to anything they would consider to be abuse of their property.

(I believe one of my readers in the US who used to live in Brazil has a little story to tell about a taxi ride. How about writing me?) ▲

## This Month on the Colony

### **Dry Season**

Our dry seasons, normally May through August, aren’t always the same. Some years we get occasional rains all the way through. And others, like this year, are dry. Very dry.

The frost we had on June 27 really did pastures in. And by now, going into the

second half of September, most silos are depleted. So there are some really skinny cattle in the area.

Farmers are doing much better. They're getting their lime and fertilizer spread, and their land worked, to be able to begin planting corn as soon as the rains come.

In the meantime, as our relative humidity plummets, a good humidifier will go a long ways toward avoiding respiratory problems. ▲

## Missions

### **A Mission is Born**

[Behind each mission field there is a story. Many times that story begins with someone's conversion experience. The Mirassol, São Paulo mission is no exception. The fine little group there began with Valentina Caldana Bonifácio's experience. Following are excerpts from her experience:]

I was born and raised in a Catholic home and I married a Catholic man. We have four children, whom I took to the priest to be baptized as infants. I recited my rosary every day and had images in my home.

But being religious didn't keep me from being worldly. I cut my hair real short, used jewelry, used makeup and immodest clothes. I saw nothing wrong with this. I believed that someday my soul, and not my body, would go to heaven. And after all, I didn't steal, kill, or mistreat my fellowmen. I had lots of friends. So surely I was a good person.

When things didn't go well, I would get out my rosary, light candles and make promises to the saints. But it didn't do any good. It never took away the insecurity or emptiness I felt. What I wanted most was to feel peace and love. I thought I was going through all this because I was poor, so I worked all the harder to acquire something in this life. Through this all I went to different churches, but never found anything that attracted me. Because of my desire to raise my standard of living, I was at times very hard. I squabbled with my husband because of the way he spent his money.

That's how the years went by. Many lonely tears were shed. There was a constant cry in my heart, "Oh Lord, how long will this go on?"

One day my married sister came over. She said she had become a crente [a Protestant convert]. I told her, "Everyone has the right to do with his life as he pleases."

She said, "But I am truly serving God now." I made it plain that I could serve God without changing religions. After she left I began thinking about what she told me.

A few days later my brother-in-law told me that I was serving the devil and not God, as I thought. These words really hit home. I had never thought it possible that I was serving the devil. From then on I began to search for God's will. I would listen to religious programs on the radio and even visited some churches, but everything was so

confusing. I never felt at ease. In one church I was advised to not pay any attention to my husband. I was to leave everything, including my husband and children if it came to that, so that I could be a Christian.

When I heard that, everything got dark for me. I came to the conclusion that I would never find peace for my soul.

That is when I began to really call upon God. The burden became heavier and heavier and I could find no rest. I would awaken early in the morning and begin praying. Even when I was at work [Valentina works on a dairy farm] I would find a secret place where I could kneel and pray. I would ask God to show me His church, because I really wanted to be saved.

I became so burdened that I didn't know what to do anymore. I decided to ask my husband to go to church with me one Sunday. We got into line to see the priest and confess our sins. When it was my turn, I told him everything I was feeling, but he told me my problem was a nervous condition. He said I was wanting to do things I shouldn't and that was the root of my problems. He advised me to pray to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, who is the sinner's advocate.

I went back to see the priest. I asked him all kinds of questions, but his answers weren't satisfactory. I left feeling downcast and more confused than ever.

When I got home I had a really bad headache. I even thought I might die. I took some medicine, but it did absolutely no good. There and then I promised God I would never again ask the priest questions. From now on I would deal directly with God and do what He asked of me. Even so, I still didn't have direction.

Then one day something got ahold of me. I felt terrible. I almost ran to my room, where I closed the door and knelt. I wept all the time. I couldn't remember any good I had done, only evil. I felt an enormous remorse, a repentance, for all my sins. I remember what I prayed, "Lord, I believe that you exist and you are the true God of power and mercy, that you are the almighty God of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ as my only Savior. Therefore I place my life, my heart and my soul in your hands. Oh Lord, have mercy on me. Pardon my sins and show me the way in which I should go, and I will trust you. I will walk in the way you show me, even though I must do it alone. Please, Lord, hear my prayer and have mercy on me."

When I finished that prayer, I felt light and a new hope was born within me. I felt that someday God would send me an answer.

Then one day when my husband and my brother were walking home, they found the tract "Ye Must be Born Again" along the roadside. When they got home, one of them gave it to me and said, "I found this along the highway. I think it has to do with crentes."

My heart began to beat fast when I saw the title. I began reading and every word was directed toward me. My emotions were stirred. It was something so marvelous.

When I finished reading, I saw the address of a church that I had never heard of before. And even though I knew nothing about this church, I felt a strong desire to write a letter. I didn't know how to go about it, but I did manage to say, "I want to be

born again in Christ.” I mailed the letter and began an anxious wait for an answer.

I received a little box of tracts. I kept some for myself and handed the rest out. But this wasn't really the answer I had hoped for. And in my weakness I thought I shouldn't write any more.

But God is wonderful and He doesn't forget the lost, but rather He calls them.

The days went by and as I studied the tracts, I came to love those words. I felt something different within me. I felt a great need to talk to someone in the church. So I decided to write another letter.

In this second letter I touched on the problems I was having with João, my husband. I began waiting for an answer. Once again I was hopeful.

The days went by and no answer came. I waited two months and still nothing. I didn't know what was happening.

Then in November of 84, I received a letter written by a brother in the church. I was so happy. I read the letter aloud so my mother could also hear. When I finished reading, I was crying. I held the letter to myself and said, “Oh God, what a beautiful thing!”

Finally I was hearing some loving counsel. I was being told how to love and respect my husband, because that is God's will. I began to lovingly follow the doctrines of the church, even though I still didn't know anyone personally. I confessed to my husband for not having been a good wife. I told him that I now wanted to serve the Lord.

From here on, each letter I wrote was like writing to my best friend in this world. And each letter that I would get was a blessing that God gave me.

The day came that I was able to learn to know the brotherhood and today I am a member of the church.

Today I have my struggles and problems, I have learned to take my refuge in God, which gives me strength. And when I see only thorns, God shows me the flowers. When tears dim my eyes, Jesus is my light and shows me the way. When the way is slippery, the Holy Spirit is my guide.

I received much more than I asked for. I am rich. I am saved. God is wonderful! May He receive all honor and glory. This is my testimony of His love. ▲

## **This & That**

On Aug. 17 the School Board and youth got together to clean up Paul & Shirley Koepf's house and yard. Two of the Monte Alegre School teachers, Corinne Isaac and Valéria Gold, will be living there. Paul is presently teaching school in Scio, Oregon.

Jair & Connie da Costa paid the Leo Dirks family in Mato Grosso a visit.

On Aug. 21 different ones from the Colony went to the Pirenópolis mission to be present in a baptismal service.

John & Joan Unruh, who also went to Pirenópolis, stayed over in Goiânia to pick up Bradley & Jolene Koehn, who came to finish up the adoption on Bruce, a little five year old boy.

Dennis & Vera Loewen and two boys returned from the US, after spending a year in North Dakota.

On Aug. 22, Milton & Cindy Loewen moved into the house where John & Alma Penner used to live. We're happy to have them as our new neighbors.

The Paul Yoder family visited the colony in Boa Esperança.

The youth cleaned up Leonard Koepf's house and yard. Anthony & Wynelle Koehn will be living there while Leonards are in the States.

Aug. 26 was clean up day at the Monte Alegre School. (In case you're wondering about all the clean-ups, by the time we get to the end of the dry season, everything needs to be cleaned up.)

On Aug. 29 Bradley returned to the States. Jolene stayed while the final paper work is being processed. Jolene and Bruce are staying with John & Joan Unruh.

On Aug. 29 Corinne Isaac arrived from Canada – anxious for school to start.

On Aug. 30 the Monte Alegre and Rio Verdinho youth girls had their annual bike outing. The idea was to pedal from Dekes over to Walt Redger's falls and back. Had they done more planning, there would have been less panting. The 35°C (95°F) heat proved to be more than some of them could hack, so a pickup had to go back picking up the victims and their bikes. Huh, Sylvia?

Sept. 2 was school enrollment, in the morning at Monte Alegre School and in the evening at Rio Verdinho.

School began on Sept. 5. At Rio Verdinho the School Board members are: Lowell Warkentin, Clifford Warkentin, Jair da Costa. The teachers are: Laura Martin – lower grades, Maxine Loewen – upper grades, Katrina Schultz – Portuguese. At Monte Alegre the School Board members are: Daniel Holdeman, Sid Schmidt, Tim Burns, Calvin Hibner, and John Unruh. The English teachers are: Corinne Isaac – first and second grades, Sylvia Becker – third and fourth grades, Velea Loewen – fifth through eighth grades. The Portuguese teachers are: Cláudia Neves – lower grades, Valéria Gold – upper grades, Luciene Rosa – pre-school and aide.

On Sept. 6 the Monte Alegre board and teachers had supper together at Deke Holdemans.

Sept. 7 is our Dia da Independência (Independence day), so no school.

The Monte Alegre church building is really looking good. A drive-through porch was added to the front of the building, which, of course, will be a real blessing on rainy days. Also, it will make a nice overflow area when there are big crowds, as frequently happens in weddings and funerals. And hopefully – maybe, perhaps – the light will dawn on the lady parishners of this congregation and they will cease to feel that the narrow entrance to our church is a parking lot, or conference room, and the most suitable place to discuss whatever they have to discuss. One solution would be to install a moving sidewalk (like they have in airports) in the entrance, with a mechanism, as per Roger Williams (See last issue of BN), that would shunt these talkers off to one side once they hit the porch.



## Brazil 17 News

Arlo & Priscilla Hibner took advantage of the Dia da Independência holiday to move into their new house.

On Sept. 13, thirteen tractors pulled into the field Dan Coblentz plans on farming and gave him a hand.

On the 15th there were 15 tractors in Arlo Hibner's field. Talk about dust!

William & Miriam Coblentz and family, from Ohio, arrived on Sept. 8. They will be going to the Mirassol mission in São Paulo state. William lived in Brazil as a little boy and learned to talk Portuguese. In the States he lived in Texas long enough to get the hang of Spanish. So now, after being gone for some 17 years, he is going to have to transform his Spaniguese into proper Portuguese and his wife will have to start from scratch. Janete Duarte will be going with them to give them a hand in their linguistic problems.

Babies born this month: Pedro & Wanderlúcia Maia, a girl, Sara, on Sept. 2. Júnior & Jussara Santos, a boy, Nelson, on Sept. 8. No room for comments.