

Brazil News



No. 41
October 1994

Editorial

When Men No Longer Remember

The word remember, in its most profound sense, denotes knowledge acquired through actual experience and stored away in the labyrinth of the mind. This goes far beyond the mere storage and retrieval of facts. It is a mental archive made up of facts accompanied by feelings.

When Israel and his eleven boys and their wives and children moved to Egypt during the terrible seven year famine, to be united with Joseph, they were a mature family. The shady, deceptive nature of the older brothers had been replaced by strong character, as they amply proved to Joseph.

The Bible is silent on most of the four hundred years that this fecund family spent in Egypt. It does tell us though, that finally "there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." Similarly, we believe, there finally came a generation of Israelites in Egypt, which knew not Joseph.

The name they knew. Many of the now legendary stories surrounding this name they knew. But in this generation the mention of his name didn't evoke the same warm feelings it had in their ancestors. They didn't share his aspirations. The longing, the dream, of someday returning to Canaan, their homeland, no longer existed. Rather, Egypt was now home.

The task which awaited Moses when he returned to Egypt, after spending 40 years in the wilderness was formidable. At first glance it appears to be a showdown between two men, Moses and Pharaoh, icons of the powers of Heaven and the powers of darkness. Our first impression is that if Pharaoh's will could have been broken, the Israelite's problems would have been solved.

God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Why? Wasn't he wicked enough the way he was? Wouldn't it have made more sense to soften his heart instead, thus avoiding the terrible losses, both of property and lives, inflicted by the plagues? Why the taskmasters? Why the slavery? Why the slaying of their children?

It was never God's will that Egypt permanently host His people. We say the move to Egypt was an emergency measure to preserve life. Certainly it was, but why stay there four hundred years? Why not wait for the famine to pass and return to Canaan?

Israel had overstayed its visit to Egypt. To them Egypt was home. Had the taskmasters been more humane, had God not hardened Pharaoh's heart, it's unlikely Moses would have succeeded in getting the Israelites to leave Egypt.

God didn't harden Pharaoh's heart because of a personal grudge against him, but rather so that he would make things bad enough to where His people would get a first hand look at the terrible powers of darkness. The plagues that virtually destroyed the country, probably had a much stronger effect on the Israelites (even though they suffered only indirectly) than on Pharaoh himself. They saw how their God looked at sin.

Four hundred years is a long time. By the time the Israelites got to the Red Sea, they were ready to return to Egypt. Once in the wilderness, their sojourn was a sequence of disasters, resulting in the death of all but two of those who crossed the Red Sea as adults. But in 40 years, memories were renewed that had been lost over a period of 400 years.

It was this exact disaster, the hundreds of thousands of carcasses left in the wilderness, that changed the outlook of those who crossed the Red Sea at 20 years or under. These children and adolescents grew to manhood with memories. Memories accompanied by strong feelings. Egypt faded and Canaan once again assumed its rightful position in their memory – even though they hadn't, as of yet, crossed the Jordan River.

Knowing how easily man forgets, God instituted an elaborate system of rituals, feast days and sacrifices, including worship in the tabernacle, all intended to help keep their memory refreshed.

That was in the old dispensation. The Bible agrees that it was an imperfect system. And yet it fulfilled its purpose. It brought Israel to Christ.

Then came the new dispensation without all the types and shadows intended to remind man of his fragile status. How was man to remember? How was he to keep alive within his heart – almost two thousand years later – the strong feelings of gratitude that the pristine Christian felt in his heart?

The solution found in the Bible is not only unique, it is divine. It is inimitable.

God knew that man can learn very little by ear. He learns best by experience. He knew that His people would never survive if it depended exclusively on one generation telling the story to the next – although this is very important. In order that everyone have a vivid memory (memory in its deepest sense, with feeling) of what life was all about, he decreed that every man, woman and child who becomes part of His kingdom experience, first of all, the bondage in Egypt, then the trek through the desert, and finally deliverance into spiritual Canaan.

We call this experience the new birth (the bondage being condemnation sent for sins, the desert the travail of the soul when the old man must die, and Canaan being the actual deliverance).

When taking a photocopy, it is always good to work from an original. Not

uncommonly photocopies are made from copies. And these in turn are copied. This can happen many times. Obviously, the quality of the copies is progressively worse, until they finally becoming illegible.

This aptly describes modern religions, which have substituted the new birth for “only believing”. Each generation “copies” the accumulated errors of former generations, and then adds their own to them, which accounts for the fact that most religions today are illegible.

The new birth makes it possible for each generation of Christians to be an exact copy of the Original, just like the apostles were. Just like the martyrs were.

This means that if it were possible to arrange for a Christian from each century since the time of Christ, beginning with one of the apostles, to sit down with a present day Christian, they would all have something in common. They would all have similar memories (with feelings) to share. A 20th century and a 10th century Christian listening to the apostle Peter could very well say, “Yes, I know just what you’re talking about. I went through the same thing.”

Men and women who have been raised in the most diverse situations, cultures and countries, who actually have nothing in common on a material level, when they encounter those who have also been born again and have received the same baptism, can sit down and reminisce, yes they can understand each other perfectly (even if through an interpreter) as they recall the different experiences of Christian life.

God’s children have existed through the ages only because of the common memory which each one shares through the new birth. As time draws to a close this may very well be one of the most outstanding (and detested) characteristics of the people of God.

Sad to say, in the world today very few churches hold the new birth as being a requirement for celestial membership – nor for church membership. Because of this they are a species in extinction. Photocopies that have become illegible.

The Bible tells about ten virgins – five who remembered to fill their lamps with oil, and five who forgot. We don’t know why they didn’t remember. They should have known better. What we do know, however, is that they pounded desperately on a closed door, which wouldn’t open.

All ten virgins looked about alike. But only five went in. The five who remembered. ▲

Life on the Colony

What We Read

Most of you folks in the US get a daily paper and possibly subscribe to a number of magazines. Have you ever wondered what we read here in Brazil?

To begin with, Rio Verde, a town of 100,000 inhabitants doesn’t have a daily paper. Don’t understand that to mean that it’s never been tried. Over the years there have been dozens of attempts at printing a local weekly. The mortality rate has been 100%

(assuming that the present paper will also soon find its resting place in our local journalistic cemetery), with an average life span of possibly a year or less.

Most of the deaths can be attributed to politics. With few exceptions, these local papers are owned by one or more politicians, or maybe a party. About the only thing that isn't biased is the date. The predictable result is that a lot of people won't touch them. I suspect that even those who are sympathetic to the views expressed finally get tired of the demagoguery.

So for all practical purposes, the Goiânia daily, O Popular, is Rio Verde's official paper. Printed during the night, it is distributed locally about the same time it is distributed in Goiânia. Different ones from the Colony buy a copy when in town. More on the O Popular in just a bit.

The most read Brazilian magazine on the Colony is VEJA, which I frequently quote in this little paper. It does well on both national and international news. Yet it can hardly be said to be like Time or Newsweek, for example, because it has a twang all of its own, a piquancy that is to Brazil what jalapeño peppers are to Mexico.

Then there are the English language publications, which include Reader's Digest, Time, National Geographic, Newsweek, Country, Farm & Ranch, Country Woman, Reminisce, Western Horseman, Progressive Farmer, beside church periodicals, of course.

Now back to the O Popular, which is to the state of Goiás sort of what the Hutchinson News is to central and western Kansas. In other words, it includes a lot of regional news. For you to get an idea of what kind of news is printed in O Popular, read on.

Sunday, September 18

Campaign Car Explodes Killing Organizers

In BN no. 16, I described some firecrackers that come in about a two-foot long launching tube. When lit they send two or three miniature bombs fifty to a hundred feet into the air, where they explode with a brilliant flash of light and a bone jarring boom. I mentioned the time I saw a few of them explode in the back of the pickup and how several men made it over the cab in record time.

The incident reported in O Popular was a lot more serious. A front page color photo shows a wreckage with charred pickup parts strewn over a thousand square yard area.

Loaded with these mini-bombs, the pickup was headed for a nearby town where a political rally was to take place. Driving through an area where there was a grass fire on the side of the road, a spark landed in the back of the pickup and set off the fireworks. The two occupants probably never knew what happened.

Tuesday, September 20

Armed Gang Takes R\$700,000 from Banco do Brasil in Rio Verde

Last month I was planning to write an article on the guards we have in all our banks, but I ran out of space. Just as well, because now there's more to write about.

By law, all Brazilian banks must be guarded around the clock. These guards, usually posted inside near the main entrance, vary from one to possibly four or five or more in a really large agency. Armed with only a revolver, they obviously are quite powerless in the event of a professional job, like the one that occurred in the Banco do Brasil. Doubtlessly these guards do scare off a lot of amateurish robbers who would give it a try if there was very little risk involved.

In the case of the Banco do Brasil, beside the normal guards, – I think two – during banking hours the Military Police constantly has at least three heavily armed men outside of the bank. But once the doors are closed to the public, they leave. And the robbers come.

I do my banking at the Banco Nacional, which is several doors down from the Banco do Brasil. Several days ago I asked the guard from there if he had been around when the robbery took place in the Banco do Brasil. Yes, he had watched the whole show and it didn't take any coaxing to get his version of what happened. His story goes something like this:

“Ya, there were five of them in a new car. They parked in front of the bank and got out with machine guns. Two of the men stayed outside and blocked off all traffic. The other three went in and right down to the vault.

“Those men were totally at ease. The heavy-set one would come out just a swinging the money bags like it was the most normal thing to do. He would open the trunk, put them in, close it, and then return for another load. They were at it for 15 minutes.

“There were people everywhere watching the show. Different ones called the police, but they didn't show up. The bank alarm was blaring away, and beside that, it's hooked up directly with the quartel (police headquarters).

“When they finally did respond to the alarm, they went to the agency up on the Avenue first, and then they came down here, but the robbers were long gone.”

Asked why it took so long for the police to respond – up to nearly a half hour, according to some – he shrugs his shoulders and says that was part of the overall plan. Others say the same thing. But then it's a lot easier to talk than to prove, so personally I would put a big question mark on this little theory.

On their way out they took the bank treasurer along for company until they got out of town, where they dropped him off.

There have been several other robberies in other local banks, but never of these proportions. R\$700 thousand is approximately US\$800 thousand dollars. Divide that by 5 (the number of men on the job), and that by 15 (minutes spent working), and you come up with US\$10,666.66 of tax free money per minute.

Airplane Explodes Killing Two

The twin engine plane belonging to the owners of the GM and Fiat agencies in Rio Verde crashed near Goiânia, killing both the pilot and a local businessman. I haven't heard since what really went wrong. People on the Colony know the owners of the plane real well.

Monday, September 26

Government Takes Action Against Black Market on Carros Populares

The carro popular is a no frills car with a one liter motor. Because it's meant for the folks who normally wouldn't be able to buy a new car, the government has drastically reduced the taxes with the understanding that industry will lower its margin of profit.

The carro popular has been such a success that today it represents approximately 40% of all sales, creating a backlog on delivery.

In spite of the acute shortage of cars, a very curious situation soon developed. Rio Verde is a good example. At the VW agency there was a two month waiting list to get a new Gol, their carro popular. Yet up the street one block, there was a car lot where there were four or five brand new Gols on the floor – 20-30% more expensive than in the agency.

Where did the cars come from? From agencies in São Paulo state and other places. Rather than sell them to their customers, they would sell them to the car lots. Why? Because they would get a cut out of the additional 20-30% charged by the car lot owners. (Just to keep the record straight, so far as I know our local VW agency is totally honest.)

Now back to the O Popular. Our Minister of Finances, Ciro Gomes, has declared war on this black-market. Any agency found doing this, or even charging black-market price right in their own showroom, as happens some places, will probably have their quota of carros populares reduced to zero, in addition to fines and other sanctions.

Tuesday, September 27

Bus Falls Into River and Kills 31 in São Paulo

A bus loaded with 60 passengers lost control as it was crossing a bridge, falling 30 feet into the water below. Thirty-one died. The reason for the accident is unknown at this point.

Monday, October 3

According to Ibope, Cardoso Will Win in the First Round

Just a little refresher. Because of the number of political parties we have here, it isn't unusual to have a half dozen or more presidential or gubernatorial candidates. Theoretically, if there were six candidates of more or less equal weight, it would be possible for one of them to be elected with slightly more than 20% of the votes. To avoid this, unless a candidate comes up with an absolute majority in the first round, there is a second round approximately a month later for the two runners-up.

In the headlines, Ibope is the organization that did the poll that predicts that Fernando Henrique Cardoso should come up with 7% more votes than all the other candidates put together.

Tuesday, October 4

Fernando Henrique is New President

Enough ballot boxes have been opened to where there is no doubt that Fernando Henrique Cardoso is the president elect.

Wednesday, October 5

Fuel Comes Down in Price

Gasoline and alcohol (the kind we use in our cars) have come down 2%. Propane gas is down 4%. This is truly amazing. It's no election trick, because elections are over. Nor is it any other kind of a trick, since it's been at least two months since our last price hike. In a country in which the laws of gravity are defied by everything going up instead of down, this is truly a phenomenon. A lot of other prices are slowly coming down too.

Friday, October 7

Inflation of 0.82% is the Lowest in the Last 21 years

There you have it. Official inflation for the month of September was less than one percent. It's too bad the British press doesn't have good news like this to report. Maybe they could give the royal family a break. ▲

A Brazilian Story

by Mário de Moraes

Should or Shouldn't We Help?

Rio de Janeiro, like other large Brazilian cities, has been invaded by beggars. There are the traditional beggars, those who wear rags and beg for a handout. Lately, however, we are beginning to see a new species of beggars. Even though these are more rare, they place a big question mark in our mind as to whether we should or shouldn't give them a handout. Unfortunately, the legitimate beggars are being infiltrated by "professionals," scoundrels who are trying to take advantage of the good will of others.

Every now and then things don't turn out so well for these rogues.

The other day a taxi driver told me a story. Two decent looking, talkative young men were standing on a street corner. When the light turned red, they would approach the cars that stopped. It was always the same story:

"We're from Friburgo. We came to Rio and ran out of money. Could you help us out so that we could buy bus tickets and head home. We study over here . . ."

The person at the wheel would have visions of his own son or daughter in a similar situation – and peel out a few bills.

The taxi driver pointed out what was happening to his passenger. "Just watch. It works every time. They're going to ask for money to buy bus tickets."

They watched and the taxi driver was right. But it happens that his passenger was a plainclothesman. Just that quick he arrested the two young men and hauled them straight to headquarters to have them booked for vagrancy. A record search showed this was by no means their first encounter with the law. In fact, they were wanted for a number of violations.

The driver finished his story by saying, “And that’s why sometimes a person doesn’t know if he should or shouldn’t help. We hate to have someone make a fool of us.”

The next story I’m going to tell you is even worse. It happened to a friend of mine by the name of Carlos. An Italian, he was a diver with the strength of a horse. I say was, because after having a heart attack he had to leave off being a professional diver. When he told me this story, however, he was still going strong.

Carlos was seated at the table of a sidewalk restaurant on the Avenida Rio Branco when a beggar woman carrying a naked child showed up asking for a handout. A soft-hearted person, Carlos not only gave the beggar lady a hefty handout, but also crossed the street with her and bought some clothes for the child. Profusely thanking her benefactor, the woman dressed her baby and continued down the street.

When Carlos got back to the restaurant, one of the waiters, who had seen everything, had a few words to say:

“I realize this is none of my business, but that woman you helped is an absolute professional at exploiting her child for making money. In fact, I have no doubt but what she has already undressed it and is begging just like before.”

A little bit later Carlos took a taxi and when going through the Mauá Square, there she was! Just like the waiter had said, the child was again naked and she was begging.

Carlos told me later on, “Moraes, I had to count to ten to keep from stopping and teaching that woman a lesson she would never forget.”

In another occasion, this same Carlos taught a beggar man a lesson he would never forget.

The man came into a bar and walked up to where Carlos was near the counter. In an inebriated voice, he asked for a handout. “Please sir, could you help me just a bit. I haven’t eaten for several days.”

The man’s breath told the whole story. Obviously the man wasn’t wanting money for anything as solid as food. Carlos called the waiter and placed an order: “Please bring me three meat sandwiches. This gentleman here is hungry. Oh yes, and plenty of water. I’m sure he’ll be thirsty by the time he finishes his meal.”

When the beggar saw what was happening, he tried to hightail it, but this was one handout he was going to get whether he liked it or not.

Beneath the severe glare of the hefty diver, one by one the three enormous sandwiches were consumed. Of one thing we can be sure. That beggar is going to think twice before he asks for food when he wants drink.

Now folks, should or shouldn’t we give? ▲

Remembering Out Loud

More on Beggars

Mário de Moraes' story brought back memories from the time I had my store in town and frequently had to face similar situations.

This first incident doesn't involve a beggar, but rather goes to show to what extremes an alcoholic will go to get his drink.

Across the corner from my store was a drugstore. One day one of the workers, a man possibly in his middle fifties, came to the store looking like he had lost his last friend. He came up to the counter and informed me his grandchild had just died and that he was asking his friends for help to buy a casket.

The man was obviously tipsy. This had a possible explanation. Even people who don't have the drinking habit will sometimes, in a time of extreme stress or sorrow, drink something to calm their nerves. I had no idea the man was an alcoholic.

I would gladly have helped if what the man said was true, so I told him I would go to the drugstore and get a few more details and possibly help.

The man didn't seem to like the idea and said some rather uncomplimentary things about me on his way out.

When he was down the street, I went to the drugstore and told the workers what had happened. One of them, a young lady in her middle twenties, set the record straight real quick:

"I am his daughter and if one of his grandchildren died, it has to be one of my children. Last I knew they were all alive."

It was an embarrassing situation. I couldn't give her my sympathy for the loss of a child – if she didn't lose one. And it would have been a bit awkward to console her for the loss of her dad – to drink – even though the expression showed how it pained her.

When we still had a lot of beggars, we often had to decide if we should give or not. So it wasn't unusual for the subject of beggars to come up in Sunday School and in group discussions. The question invariably was, should or shouldn't we give. This brought out an interesting cultural difference between the Americans and Brazilians.

The American would often take the pragmatic stance that if we give to beggars, we are merely prolonging their misery. If they would get to work they wouldn't have to beg.

The Brazilian, on the other hand, usually advocated helping whenever possible, without worrying about what the money would go for. To them it was a conscience matter. I believe that this is a reflex of what could almost be termed a national conscience. Especially the Catholics and Spiritists place a high value on certain good works, of which helping beggars is probably right up at the top of the list.

When you get down to it, both viewpoints are neither totally right nor totally wrong. Today we have a consensus that I feel would be practical in most countries and in most circumstances. No one should feel he is morally or spiritually obligated to help every beggar that comes to him for help. Nor should one take the radical attitude that it is

wrong to help a beggar. Rather, each time a situation like this presents itself, there should be a quick moment of reflection – a moment for the Spirit to speak. If He says nothing, walk on. If He says “Stop,” then do so, and see what kind of an open door you find. It works.

I remember especially three beggars who have enriched my life.

The first was a man by the name of Alfredo. He was born in 1898 (He showed me his tattered birth certificate). Alfredo’s dad was born, if I’m not mistaken, in the little Baltic country of Lithuania. Upon moving to Brazil, he apparently moved to the city of Americana, in the state of São Paulo. The Americana area is made up principally of American and European emigrants. In fact, the city was founded by Southerners who left the US after the Civil War, hoping to be able to keep on operating with slaves here in Brazil (A few years later slaves were emancipated here too).

Alfredo would come to my store almost every day and read the O Popular. He was a very intelligent man who especially enjoyed the international news. He wasn’t a beggar in the true sense of the word, and yet . . .

We spent hours talking together. He would tell about life in Americana. Apparently he got married there. That, I soon found, was a closed chapter in his life. No amount of gentle prodding would induce him to discuss his past so far as his marriage was concerned. It was evident there was a deep, smoldering flame of resentment in his life. Apparently he cut all ties with his family and moved to Rio Verde, where for years he worked as a realtor. Even the very occasional visits from one of his daughters seemed to have brought little results.

I don’t believe Alfredo ever asked me for a thing, other than for permission to read the paper. In fact, it was the opposite. The Japanese girl who worked in my store treated him with typical oriental courtesy. He would frequently slip a piece of candy into her hand, or maybe even bring her an orange.

And yet, out on the street, I would see him going through other people’s trash, looking for something usable. He stayed in a cheap boarding house. I have heard the owner kept him as a charity case.

Alfredo came to church a few times. I discussed religion with him different times, and he did consider himself a religious person, but I could never get past the barrier he had set up.

Already in his nineties, I understand he developed cancer and his daughter finally managed to take him back to Americana, where he died.

I miss Alfredo.

Then there was a beggar woman by the name of Maria, who incidentally was a sister to the man Clifford Warkentin bought his place from here in Brazil.

Every Saturday at about the same time of the day this very old lady would come into my store, sit down in the same chair in front of my desk, and we would talk. She would tell me her woes.

I don’t know how many stops she would make on her Saturday pilgrimages. I do know she walked way up the Avenue and at Comercial Ipiranga (where quite a few of

the Colonists do business), she would be given a week's supply of coffee. Wherever or however many stops she made, it must have brought in enough to make it through another week.

She has died.

Finally there was a shriveled up little lady, about the size of a 12 year old child. Her visits were sporadic. She would tell me all her woes, how the roof blew off of her shanty, how very sick she was and how that she almost died. Finally after a certain amount of time my standard greeting became, "You mean you haven't died yet?" Sorrowfully she would shake her head and say, "No, the Lord hasn't called me home yet."

I don't know if she is still alive. After I sold my store I saw her only a few times.

I miss Alfredo, Maria and this last lady, whose name I don't know.

One thing I can tell you. A beggar can be just as interesting as anyone else. And yes, they do have a soul.

Mário de Moraes asks: Should or shouldn't we give? Do any of you readers who have lived in a foreign country have an inspirational experience to send me? ▲

This Month on the Colony

End of the Dry Season?

At least we hope we have come to the end of the driest dry season we have had in the 25 years we are in Brazil.

In the months of May through September, we had exactly 26 mm of rain, which is just a shade over an inch. That is an average of 0.2 inches per month. Project that over a 12 month period and we would have an annual rainfall of 2.4 inches instead of 80 – 110. Of course, that kind of projecting is meaningless. What will make the difference is whether the rains will continue.

Especially hard hit by a five month dry period like this one, is Brasília. Due to their elevation, or something or other, their relative humidity plummets. Several times it hit 11% in the last month, which equates them with the Sahara Desert. Hardest hit are children and the aged, who soon suffer from severe dehydration. Hospitals become filled to capacity.

Our relative humidity here at Rio Verde dropped to the lower thirties, which is quite uncomfortable.

Our first real rain (at least for some of us) came on October 6. It was atypical in that we had very little lightning and thunder. The wind storm, however, was most typical of our first rains.

The long dry period has brought the Monte Alegre River down to the lowest level anyone can remember in the last 25 years. Some of you readers have seen the turbine that is installed along side the falls that generates electricity for Daniel Kramers and

several other households. They have had to sandbag half way across the top of the falls to be able to get enough water into the channel that supplies water for the turbine.

For the next month or six weeks we will have to put up with flying termites and beetles. They emerge from the ground after a rain and especially in the evening after it gets dark. Attracted to light, they swarm around yard lights, porch lights and windows.

So far as actual damage, they do very little. But they sure are a nuisance. ▲

Wildlife

Wild Pigs Invade Southern Brazil

At the beginning of this century, some hunting resorts in Uruguay imported several pairs of wild pigs – javelins – from Europe. After some time they got out of their enclosure and began to reproduce in the wild. Extremely prolific, they soon could be found all over Uruguay. Then in parts of Argentina, and now in southern Brazil.

The javelin is much larger than the wild pigs we have here in our area. An adult animal weighs an average of 150 kgs. (330 lbs.), is 40 inches tall and twice that long. Vicious, illusive animals, they are a real challenge to hunters. Not only do they frequently kill the dogs used in the hunts, but injure the hunters themselves. Unless shot in the head or heart, they seem to be immune to bullets.

At present it is estimated that there are two thousand javelins in Brazil. However, given their high rate of reproduction and the difficulty in hunting them down, they may soon raise havoc for both farmers and ranchers.

By 1982 there were so many javelins in Uruguay that the government declared them a national pest and officially condoned hunting them. Now many farmers hire professional hunters rid to their properties of these animals.

Along the border between Brazil and Uruguay, over 400 of these animals have been killed. They are all that people can talk about anymore.

Swank restaurants in Rio and São Paulo, where javelin meat is considered a delicacy, would like to see these wild pigs grow even more in number.

They may well have their wish come true. ▲

Communications

Mato Grosso

Pioneering almost always involves lack of communications. The colony in Mato Grosso is no exception.

But that problem has been solved. Some sort of shortwave radios have been installed and now it's possible to communicate.

The instalation proper has a rather interesting story to it. One radio was installed in Myron Kramers residence, here on the Colony. The other one was sent to Mato Grosso for his brother Dan to install in his place. However neither one knew that the the other had actually installed his unit.

After Myron got his radio hooked up, he pressed the mike button and whistled into it. Just about that quick he got a return whistle. Contact had been established.

To say the least, to be in daily contact will solve a lot of problems in a matter of minutes that otherwise could take up to several days or a week. ▲

Cellular Phones

Our present phone system, called Renac, was developed in Brazil to be used in rural areas. As some of you know, it involves going through an operator in town. For someone who doesn't speak Portuguese, this sometimes turns out to be sort of a nightmare.

Obviously it's a system that leaves a lot to be desired. But let's face it. We have gotten a lot of good out of these phones. In spite of the fact that sometimes about all you could do over them was whistle, they did put us in touch with each other, with Brazil and with the rest of the world. I don't think any of us will forget the first international call we made.

Everything indicates that Renac phones will soon be history. This coming Thursday afternoon the Colony will be having a meeting with the telephone company to discuss the transition to rural cellular phones.

Because these phones are stationary, meant to help in the development of rural areas, we will be billed only for outgoing calls. Up to four hundred and some minutes per month, the rates are very reasonable.

Hopefully the next issue of BN will report that our phones are installed and working. If they are, a list of those who have these phones and the respective numbers will be published. ▲

People

A Sad End

In BN issue no. 33, I wrote about a young man called Salmo de Davi. Last Sunday Mark Loewen announced in church that Salmo had passed away and that his burial would be the following morning.

According to Paulo David's wife, Mel, Salmo's brother Jorge was there when he died. This is the story he told:

Salmo was in Goiânia at his sister's house, who is a Pentecostal. Everyone knew his end was near. Believing he could yet be healed, her church folks began praying

and creating a real carrying on, making it almost impossible to have any kind of conversation with Salmo.

About two o'clock in the morning, on the day of his death, Jorge (a brother in our church), went to Salmo's room. He was awake, so Jorge asked him if he could talk to him. Salmo agreed.

Jorge then asked him if he had made any preparations to depart this life. Salmo merely shrugged his shoulders. So Jorge got out his Bible and began to read to him. Then he prayed.

Once again Jorge asked him if he was ready to go. Salmo's reply, possibly some of his last words, was, "Let's not talk about this." Apparently that's how he left this life.

People talk about Christian life being hard. But it can't possibly be as hard as a life of sin. Some people would like to live a life of sin, and then get converted just before they die. It isn't that easy. No one knows when the door of mercy will click shut. ▲

1969 – 1980 Youth

The first Sunday evening church service is always a joint meeting, alternating between Rio Verdinho and Monte Alegre. Instead of an introduction, the youth sing until 8 o'clock.

The first Sunday evening of this month, those who were in the youth from 1969 – the beginning of the Colony – until 1980, sang.

During that period our youth group reached a high of 64 youth. Some of them have moved away and a few didn't get up to sing. Even so, there were 42 up front. Of that group, five are now ministers and two are deacons.

When our present youth all get up to sing, there are 14 from Rio Verdinho and 16 from Monte Alegre. Add the youth from the Rio Verde congregation and the missions, and we have a total of 48. Twenty-three are native Brazilians. ▲

Readers Write

Almas

[During a telephone conversation several days ago with Sam Coblenz, the missionary from Patos, Paraíba, he asked me if I would be interested in hearing a story from the Northeast. I told him yes, to fire it over. It got here just in time to get it into this issue of BN. The word alma means soul.]

Here in the Northeast it seems most of the people live in perpetual fear of so many things. Even the children, when playing on the street, soon begin discussing "the forest woman" who makes weird noises and carries off children. But close to everyone's heart

are the almas, here used to describe a deceased person with a wicked past, whose spirit has returned and now wanders about seeking rest.

A couple of months ago we drove up into a mountain range south of Patos, where we're stationed, to get a little fresh air. In the evening the neighbors would drift in to visit. That is when we picked up some interesting stories. The first one I heard from two different people, and amazingly, the details were quite similar.

A man by the name of Batista told us that he was walking home one night. His two younger brothers were a little ways ahead of him. He happened to look off to the right, and there in the darkness he saw the figure of a person coming up out of the squash plants. He yelled for his brothers to come back, because he was seeing an alma.

Slowly the alma came up to where Batista stood glued in his tracks. Thrown over her [The feminine pronoun is used because alma is a feminine noun.] right shoulder was a shroud.

When the alma got right next to Batista, she suddenly threw the shroud down at his feet. "I saw it just as plain as could be, right there in front of me. Now what was I going to do? How was I going to get over that thing?"

Suddenly the alma began backing away from him. At exactly the same spot where she first appeared, she now disappeared. He tried to run, but his feet seemed to be made of lead. When he finally did make it home, his two brothers were waiting for him. When they heard him yell, instead of returning to help him, they took off running for home.

As we sat around the bonfire talking in the cool mountain air – really different from the hot air where we live – another fellow told his story. He said he had walked past the same place where Batista had his scare. He too heard a noise and then a white figure appeared and stopped in front of him. His first thought was to grab the revolver he had stuck in his belt and fire in that direction, hoping to scare the alma.

But then he remembered having heard someone say that that only makes things worse. The best solution is to walk right up to the alma and prove you're not scared. So he began walking toward the ghostly figure. He figured if he could get right up to it without showing fear, it would leave.

But it didn't work. Finally, in a last desperate attempt, he grabbed the alma – and discovered he was hanging onto a donkey!

Those sitting around the fire agreed that fear itself can cause one to have strange experiences.

Many obviously don't feel that way. The fear of almas is causing cities to grow. Some people are so scared that they wouldn't consider living in the country anymore.

Sam included several questions which may be of interest to more readers.

If Lula gets into office, could that affect our freedom of religion?

First of all, now that the election tallies are in, Lula, the socialist candidate, was not elected. But even if he would have become president, it wouldn't have affected our religious freedom, for at least two reasons: 1) Our Constitution is very generous in

granting religious freedom. The president does not have any authority to change the Constitution. That is a prerogative of Congress. 2) The only way a president could override the Constitution would be with the help of the military. That would have been totally out of the question. For one thing Lula was not their candidate. Furthermore, the military values religious freedom as much as anyone else.

Is Brazil's new currency [the real] for real?

In other words, will it eliminate inflation? The plan is very good and so far it has worked. However, it will take constant adjustments. And who could possibly be more qualified to see the plan through to maturity than its mentor, president-elect Fernando Henrique Cardoso? ▲

This & That

Duane Miller returned from the US, after spending several months with his folks, Enos & Clara Miller, at Lobelville, Tennessee.

Will & Ann Miller and Richard & Edith Mininger returned from short visits in the US. On Sunday, September 18, the Monte Alegre and Rio Verdinho Congregations had a house warming for the Arlo Hibner family.

Bert Coblentz is spending a short time here with his son Jonathan.

Duane & Frances Holdeman, Elias & Colleen Stoltzfus, and Keleda Loewen spent several days in the Mirassol, São Paulo mission, helping the new missionaries, William & Miriam Coblentz get settled, together with their Portuguese teacher, Janete Duarte.

The book, *The Shining Sword*, has been translated and is now being proofread by Paulo David and Luís Fernandes. It was serialized in *O Mensageiro* and was very well received by readers. We hope to soon have it in print.

A number of sisters from the three local congregations had a surprise sunshine shower for Francisca Oliveira, our widowed sister in the Rio Verde Congregation.

On September 29, John & Sheila Kramer had a boy, Clifton Wayne. He looks just like any other white baby that age. So there, you know what Clif looks like.

Divino Cândido and his family, from Goiânia, spent several days on the Colony, as they occasionally do. Divino is a public accountant. When he got converted he thought he might lose some customers if he told them he would no longer do shady work so that they could get out of paying taxes and get other benefits. Just the opposite happened. Today his business is more prosperous than before.

Reno & Marilyn Hibner are spending several weeks in the US. Cristiane and Raquel Garcia are staying in their house while they are gone.

On October 5 we had our last Wednesday Bible Study class for this season. Both the English and Portuguese adult classes studied subjects suggested by the class. The youth, English and Portuguese, based their studies on *A Study in Christian Doctrine*. We had good attendance.

Brazil 17 News

Looking outside, she saw smoke pouring out of the bamboo grove near her folks-in-law's house. She rushed to church and told them what was going on.

It turned out that the day before Frances had lit some dry leaves piled around a rubber tree stump, hoping to burn it out. Sunday it was still smoldering away and apparently a gust of wind carried a spark to some nearby dry grass, which caught fire and spread to the dry bamboo grove.

There are few fires that make more noise than burning bamboo. Made up of short airtight sections, as they heat up they literally explode (which is what Linda heard). Fortunately the fire was put out without any major damage, except to an old chickenhouse. Had it not been for the exploding bamboo, which served as a fire alarm, the house could easily have burned down.