

Brazil News



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Editorial

What is Truth?

To someone born in a Mennonite home, truth is an absolute value. Our parents have done an exceptionally good job of teaching the “yea, yea, nay, nay” principle.

To us this principal is extremely serious. To deliberately answer “no” when we know the answer is “yes”, to us is a serious matter, or rather, a sin—a sin that robs us of our peace. We assume that everyone should have this same conscience.

One of the most shocking experiences in moving to a Latin American country is to discover that yea can at times mean nay, and nay, yea. Even after becoming Christians, their standard of truth is by no means the same as ours.

Must we conclude we are dealing with a cultural problem?

Here in Brazil there is no absolute concept of truth or untruth. Between the opposite poles of white and black, there are many subtle shades. Circumstances, more than principal, determine what is morally acceptable when it comes to handling the truth.

To understand better the “flexibility” given to the truth here, we’ll take just a quick look at some of the different types of mentiras (lies) that exist.

Mentira do gasto—Unfortunately, this term has no translation. A crude attempt would be a “lie of convenience”. This lie is used when it would be stupid not to lie. For example, the government generously decides to give everyone who makes less than a hundred dollars a month a bag of rice. When asked how much you make at your job, you answer, “Ninety-five dollars,” which is true. Then the man asks, “Do you do any work on the side?” You do. Actually, you make around fifty dollars on the side. If you tell the truth, very likely you won’t get the bag of rice. So, yea becomes nay.

It doesn’t bother your conscience because: 1) The government is rich, 2) You need the rice, 3) If you go home without the rice and the neighborhood finds out why, you will be considered an absolute idiot.

Once, talking to another American about a similar situation, I remarked, “I’m sure

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it didn't bother the man's conscience to do what he did." My friend took it one step further. He said, "Really, it would have probably bothered his conscience if he wouldn't have done it." Truly.

It takes a lot more than a casual religion to get a Brazilian to quit mixing yea and nay when convenient.

Diplomatic lie—This one is really tough. It's a little bit like a medical lie, when a doctor hides all or part of the truth from a patient because of possible undesirable consequences.

An example: Your neighbors decide to go on a little outing. They ask to leave their year old baby with you. This being the first time they are separated, baby keeps everyone awake until three o'clock in the morning with his unearthly shrieks.

The next evening when the parents come to get their baby, it's obvious they have had a good time. They ask, "Was Susie good?"

"Yes, yes," you say.

"Did she keep you up last night?"

"Oh, for maybe 10 minutes. Then she went to sleep."

The couple smile. Really it was a beautiful trip—with a beautiful end.

You smile too. You helped keep it beautiful. Down deep you feel good.

The diplomatic lie is very prevalent within the church here.

A mentira—A lie. A down right lie. Now we're talking about something dangerous. To lie with the specific purpose of deceiving, hurting or taking advantage of one's fellowman (as opposed to the government, a bank, or someone very rich) is very, very wrong. Not so much before God as before man. The penalty for such an infraction at times is death.

Knowing the possible consequences of an outright lie, Brazilians think twice before telling one. In fact, there are many who maintain a high standard when it comes to a blatant lie.

The thing that weighs heavily in a Latin's mind is: Will saying yea for nay hurt anyone? If not, there is nothing morally wrong with telling a lie of convenience or a diplomatic lie.

Some of my readers with low blood pressure may feel somewhat weak to know that such a situation exists here.

Now let's flip the coin and look at the other side.

I found out that Brazilians consider some Americans to be accomplished liars.

To understand why, let's create an imaginary situation.

In your local town there is a millionaire. Everyone knows him. Everyone knows how he made his fortune (building and renting out houses, for example). Everyone knows that financially he is in tip top shape.

Mr. Johnson, however, has a distressing little habit. When interest rates go up and money gets tight, he begins to cry the blues. He complains: "If things don't get better, I'll soon be broke." Or, "This crisis is terrible. I don't know where my next meal is coming from."

Everybody knows Mr. Johnson. When he talks like that, no one takes him seriously. No one considers him to be a liar. To an American that isn't a lie.

To a Brazilian it is. This is the first thing the rich boss tells his poor employee, "Não tem dinheiro."

When things get tight here and we Americans begin to talk about how hard up we are, they put about as big a question mark on our truthfulness as we do on theirs.

What is truth? What is a lie?

Does the Lord expect Brazilians to tell the truth the same as we do? If He does, someplace something has gone wrong. Does yea really mean yea? Does nay always mean nay?

To our way of looking at things, the answer obviously is yes. Yes! Yet we have some really sincere members in the church who give truth a different application than we do. I am referring especially to the diplomatic untruth.

At this point you are expecting me to come up with a real neat little explanation for all this.

Sorry. Not this time. I invite you readers to carefully think about this. If you come up with some inspiration, write me. Tell me how you think such a situation should be dealt with. I'd like to print a few of your ideas. ▲

During Carnival, the psychologist from the children's home came out to see the boys spending time here on the Colony. Our daughter Sylvia took her around. Getting into the car, she quickly lit up a cigarette. Seeing a small children's Bible with a piece of paper stuck in it on the dash, she opened it. The piece of paper turned out to be a tract entitled, *É Pecado Fumar?* (Is it Sin to Smoke?).

A mere coincidence?

My Life

Lucimar Viera da Silva Cardoso

[When Lucy's husband, José, was hired to work in the Colony printery she remained in Goiânia. To both of them, this was just one more job — with the added inconvenience that they would only see each other once or twice a month.

I knew some of José's history. At an auction sale he told me about his earlier life, which is anything but tame.

I didn't know anything about Lucy's past. The very "mennonitish" way she looks and dresses gives no clue to what she may have been through.

When I got back from the US a week ago, Faith told me she had been to José and Lucys for supper. She said Lucy had told her life's history and that I had to hear it too. We invited them over and after supper we sat down in my study and listened to what she had to say.

What follows here is an almost verbatim transcript of what she had to say. Remember, José and Lucy are your brother and sister.]

When I was eight years old, my mother gave me to my older sister. I lived with her until I was 12 years old. These were four happy years in my life. She didn't have any children, so I was sort of like their daughter.

My dad moved around a lot during this time. On one of these moves, he took me along to his house. Two years later my sister came and got me again. She didn't like the way I was being treated. My dad didn't see me as his teenager daughter. To him I was nothing more than a farmhand.

I was 12 years old before I began to learn to read. In the beginning I merely learned the alphabet, but not how to form words. But with time and a lot of effort, I began reading.

My other sister got married. She took me to Goiânia, where I lived with her for a year and eight months. I began studying in a private school, where I got my basic education. I was 15 years old.

During this time my dad sent my brother away from home. Before he left he said to me, "When I get ahead in life, I'll come for you." Two years later he got married and I went to live with them. I got to study in the best school in Brasília. What I didn't know was that I was falling into an enormous trap. They were just waiting for a naive youth like me.

I began to smoke. I had already in the past smoked cigarettes made of corn husks. First they gave me some cigarettes. Then they gave me several packs. I had no idea that these cigarettes were packed with "poison". They were loaded with marijuana. Soon I was addicted.

That is when they quit giving me cigarettes. I had to begin buying them. The money my brother gave me to pay tuition in school, I began to spend on drugs. I would leave in the morning as if going to school, but actually I had already quit studying.

One morning my brother found me sitting on the curb outside of the school where I was supposed to be studying. He took me home. That day he didn't ask any questions. He knew I was drugged, so he didn't let me out of the house for two weeks.

I lived in constant fear that someone was watching me. One day the phone rang. A strange voice said, "If you tell anyone where you were buying your drugs, you're done for." Now I was really scared.

I was desperate for more drugs, but didn't have money to buy them. Finally I decided to open up with a friend of mine. He promised to help me, but said he would have to tell my family what was going on. He said they could get me into a specialized clinic where I would find help. But I was ashamed to do this. As a last effort, he gave me plain cigarettes—without marijuana.

I had another friend. She was on drugs. She said, "I can help you. I make my own drugs with cocaine (the kind dentists use). Buy some." How? I was broke. So she gave me some cocaine, the acid I would need, plus some syringes. She taught me how to make the stuff.

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While I was on this drug, I lost interest in other things. My relatives were sure I was abnormal—especially since I didn't show any interest in boys.

The friend I mentioned before tried to help me again. He said he had found a good clinic and was going to tell my family what was going on.

This upset me tremendously. I mixed up a cocktail of potent drugs and took it all at once. This happened at eight o'clock in the evening, on November 2, 1971. I didn't awaken until December 22.

Psychiatrists tried to find out what was wrong with me, why I would want to take my own life. They felt I had some sort of a mental block. I did. It was drugs. That is all I wanted. Before going on drugs, I weighed 60 kilos. Now I was down to 41 kilos. After my suicide attempt, I was unable to walk for a year and three months. For three months I didn't even talk. I had no sensation of hot or cold. I was more dead than alive.

I had always hated my dad. I didn't really know why. When the doctors said I would have to have surgery on my esophagus, he said, "She wanted to die. Let her die!" I was needing to have surgery because the acids in the mixture I made up to commit suicide had partially destroyed my tongue and my esophagus, as well as other internal organs.

My brother, the one who took me to Brasília, came to my rescue. He said, "Even if it takes every cent I have, I won't let my sister die."

Five months later I was taken to the Sara Kubitchek Hospital in Brasília [the same hospital that Cris Alves spent some time in]. They did therapy on me so that I could regain the use of my hands. At this time they were totally useless. I couldn't sit or stand either. Sometimes my sisters-in-law would jokingly say, "You know what Lucy? You're so awful that even Satan didn't have any use for you in hell." My mother would come to my rescue and say, "It's because God didn't let her go." Through all this my hatred for my dad got worse and worse.

After a year and three months, I was better. I got married. When I found out that the fellow made his living by raising marijuana, I left him. This marriage lasted two years and four months. I didn't want to have anything to do with someone like that.

I went back to my brother in Brasília. He welcomed me back with wide open arms and again tried to help me. He said I wasn't the first woman to have problems in her life, and certainly I wouldn't be the last one either. He said I should wait and see what God had in store for me. Three days a week I worked for him in his printery and three days I worked in a little booth where they sold magazines and papers.

Then one day I found out that some of my relatives wanted to take me back to the farm where my husband lived. They were making preparations without saying a word to me. My sister-in-law found out and told me about it. I up and left for Rio de Janeiro, where I lived for nine months.

Then I decided to return to Brasília. I told them that I refused to go back to my husband and that I wouldn't live with my dad either. They told me I was a disgrace to the family, that only street women didn't live with their husbands.

I went to Goiânia to see my sister. She said, "Find work and stay with us."

I decided to take a short course and become a nurse. The worst of it was that really

what I wanted by now was to be in a place where there were a lot of drugs. I wasn't afraid of the world anymore. I got back on drugs.

José was a childhood friend of mine. We had played together a lot. We saw each other occasionally and I began telling him about my life. I didn't know if I could trust him.

Then one day my youngest brother and I had a fight. He said he knew all about me and that I was on drugs again. I was beside myself when I realized he knew what was going on. I told him I was going to get out of there. He said no way. He was going to try and help me. So he began inviting me to go to parties and different places of entertainment with him.

My brother thought he was helping me. What he didn't know was that I was getting medications in the hospital where I worked. I learned how to mix up my own special drugs. To a certain extent, I was doing it as vengeance against others—especially my dad.

One day my brother told me he had heard about a clandestine casino in Goiânia. He knew how I enjoyed playing cards, so we decided to go there. I found out that a lot of important people from the high society were secretly coming to this place.

During one of these visits, someone asked me what I was doing there. I said, "If I had money, I would gamble like everyone else." A man who was a good friend of ours said, "You're going to be my 'bet placer'."

This was fine with me. I wanted to make money. I didn't care how. After all, I felt like I had nothing to lose anymore at this stage of the game.

I began spending my evenings in the casino. I would play cards. When my boss didn't show up, I simply played for him. During all this I got involved in selling contraband whiskey. People would tell me what they wanted and I would find them that particular kind of imported whiskey. Then I got to thinking that if I could make money with contraband whiskey, why not sell drugs too?

Once again my youngest brother caught on to what I was doing. He threatened to let the cat out of the bag. I hated him for this. I told him it was better to sell whiskey than to sell myself.

I went to work. When I got home I took half a dozen of the pills I had gathered up. Then I went out to drink beer with some friends. José was along. I started to get dizzy. José began to give me some good advice. He said I should quit living like this and begin a new life. I told him I didn't want to hear any sermons from him.

One day when I was getting off work at the hospital, the fellow I worked for in the casino was waiting for me at the door. Half jokingly he said, "You have done things I didn't like, and now I'm going to get even with you." I knew that he sold both contraband whiskey and drugs. His words really shook me up. I took out running. When I got home I asked my neighbor if she knew anyone in São Paulo. I wanted to get out of here as quickly as possible. She didn't know if she could take me seriously. Trying to make light of what I was doing, she asked, "Was it God or the devil that told you that you need to go to São Paulo?" Actually, her parents needed someone badly to help them.

When I told José what I was about to do, he told me not to go. I asked him why and he said he liked me. I had always thought we were mere friends. It really set me thinking, that someone would actually like me.

That same day I left for São Paulo. The people I went to live with in São Paulo were from the Presbyterian church. The man was a deacon. Being sickly, he needed a nurse to take care of him.

This couple took me under their wing. I felt they actually loved me. I began to feel a great love for this family. They let me feel that they trusted me. Whenever I got a letter, or sent one, I would let them read it.

When I moved back to Goiânia, José began talking seriously about getting married. I was real close to his folks, so one day I asked his dad if he thought José and I could get along. As an answer, he made a long straight line on the wall. He said, “If you can walk straight like this, yes.”

Then I began getting opposition from my family. They said José and I would never get along. What they didn’t know was that after living with the couple in São Paulo, I now had faith in my heart.

José and I began living together. I wanted badly to have a child, so I started seeing doctors. When they found out about my past, they told me it would be impossible. They decided to operate. After the surgery, they told me I had one chance in a thousand of having a baby. This threw me for a loop. Once again I decided to run away from my problems. I jumped a bus for Brasília. I still had my stitches from the surgery and it wasn’t time to take them out. Even so, I went to the hospital where I had worked and asked the nurses to take them out. Then I went to my brother’s house—the one who always helped me when I had problems. He wasn’t at home. He and his wife had gone to Goiânia see me.

I took a bus back to Goiânia. He gave me a good chewing out. He said José was trying to help me and I should accept his help.

I resumed my prayer life. I realized that I had been wrong in demanding that God give me a child. I told Him I wanted a child if that was His will.

The day came when I found out I was expecting. The doctor said both I and the unborn child were running a serious risk. Everything went well and our first son, Jocymar, was born. The next one I lost. Then came our daughter, Jaqueline.

José found work in Brasília, so we moved there. My family always said to José, “You mean you are still together with this woman?” They didn’t think God was able to change my life.

We went through a lot during these years. Then José got a job in the printery on the Colony where the tracts are printed. After three months I made my first visit to see where he was working. I went to church. Everything looked orderly. Even so, I said that no matter how much it might look like paradise, I wanted no part of it. José asked that I move to the Colony. As always I was agitated about something. At this time we were going to a Pentecostal church in Goiânia. I constantly was asking prayers for something. I asked the Lord to help me, to take away my rebellious spirit.

Finally I broke down and came to the Colony for another visit. I told Daniel Martin, “I want to see the house where we’ll be living.” He thought this rather strange, knowing I didn’t want to live on the Colony.

On June 23, 1990 José and I were officially married. After all that I had been through, things were finally looking better. On July 7 we moved to the Colony. I told José ahead of time that I wouldn’t do without my TV and that I had no intentions of going to church every Sunday. After all, I belonged to another church.

One day, while awake, I had a terrible experience—like a nightmare. I decided to get my Bible and see if it would help me out. This was on August 5 of 1990. I opened my Bible to the 86th Psalm. I don’t know what happened. It seemed like I was taken from one world to another. I began to talk with God. Before I thought I had to ask His forgiveness for things I had done wrong. Now I realized I needed His forgiveness for what I was.

Then I wrote down everything I had been through. When I reread it, I said, “Is it possible I have been through all this and am here to tell about it?” My sister-in-law used to say that even Satan didn’t want me. What I do know is that God called me.

I owe much to the old couple in São Paulo. They told me about the beauties of the Bible. They showed me there is but one God.

The night after I read that Psalm, I dreamed that Richard Mininger was baptizing me. Then I dreamed that I should read a certain passage in the Bible. I didn’t even know it existed, but the next day I got my Bible and found it. Then someone suggested I read the book of Ecclesiastes. That day I read it eight times. I came to the conclusion that everything I had ever done was but “wind”, as the Psalmist says.

Today I am a member of the Church. I have my struggles. Sometimes I become anxious, but I have faith that God is always leading. He shows me new things on the way of life. I want to continue faithful in the Church of God in Christ.

I hope someday at least some of you readers can meet José and Lucy. They, as many other Brazilian members, are one of the big blessings of living in this country.

How many other “Lucys” aren’t needing our help? How many more couldn’t be saved? ▲

Health

Belgium or India?

One of the ironies of third-world countries is the Belgium/India syndrome. That is, the dramatic contrasts that exist between the different social levels.

Brazil is no exception. And no where is this more evident than in the area of health. On one hand we have very modern hospitals with competent doctors and nurses. On the other we see people getting into line at six o’clock in the afternoon and spending

the entire night waiting on the sidewalk to be able to get a guia (authorization) to see the doctor in the next day or so.

Our Minister of Health, recently ousted for corruption, was replaced by Brazil's top heart surgeon, Dr. Adib Jatene. He appears to be as able a politician as surgeon.

Following are excerpts from an interview with VEJA magazine. Asked whether the blame for these problems rests with legislation that wasn't thought through—or with legislation that was very carefully thought through to benefit a few powerful interest groups, he answers:

JATENE—We can blame this on the very way that Brazil operates, which is complicated. In a city the size of São Paulo, it is possible to find at the same time the First World and the Third World. It's the old story about Belgium and India. We see this in the entire country. The poorer sectors of society don't have the same influence that big business has. This is where the poor get into trouble. The poor man's friend is also poor. All of his friends are poor. He has no friends who are able to influence authorities to get money flowing in his direction. The exact opposite is true for the rich. They always find a solution for their problems because all, or almost all, of their friends are rich or influential. In a few words, this means we have a serious social problem, which is the fruit of an unbalanced society.

VEJA—How can this vicious circle be broken?

JATENE—Alone I can't do it, but I can help. In my first meeting with the president, I was impressed with his vision of what we are facing in Brazil in the area of health. I saw we were on the same wave length. I told the president that I didn't feel there was any point in trying to come up with some great projects, which after all don't solve the structural problems we have in this country. What is going to be important when the president leaves office are the social statistics: a reduction of infant mortality, a better vaccination program, better public health, a solution for the slum areas and better school attendance. The president agreed with me, which means I'm not alone in my feelings.

VEJA—Your theme then is less hospitals, but which are better equipped?

JATENE—The problem isn't to build hospitals, but rather to keep them in operation. Both health and education have a similar problem. Once the hospital or school is constructed, that is where the spending begins. A hospital isn't a money making project. To operate a hospital for a year takes the exact amount of money it took to build it. Rather than thinking in terms of more hospital beds, we should think about recuperating the ones that we now have. Hospitals that are being built will be finished, but that will be it so far as construction is concerned. Our priority now is to remodel, preserve and improve the hospitals that are already in operation.

VEJA—Where should money be invested in order to eradicate [some of these basic problems]?

JATENE—So far as more hospitals are concerned, they would have no influence on a reduced mortality rate. What we are needing, above all, is preventive medicine, which would include immunization programs and local health programs. So far as city water,

we are in good shape. We need to invest in better sewer systems. Just in the Northeast we ought to spend eight billion US dollars to install sewer systems in cities with more than ten thousand inhabitants.

It is men like Dr. Jatene who are going to change Brazil. Unfortunately, we don't have nearly enough of them in government.

The excess of hospitals that he talks about is a reality. New hospitals are built and opened just before elections. As can be imagined, the poor people vote heavily for the politicians responsible for their construction. A year or two later they are either totally or partially shut down. In other words, to the politician, a hospital is an institution for delivering votes, not babies.

Right now in Rio Verde we have a new "political" hospital: the Hospital Regional. It is a nice clean place with very good doctors. People don't pay a cent for the treatment they receive. But how long will it have funds to keep it open?

Very likely, not very long. ▲

A Story

A Misunderstanding

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

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

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

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

This brings us to the setting for this story. Many years ago Daniel Kramer had approximately 25 acres of woods—the cultura type—below his house, along the Monte Alegre River. A man by the name of Adão, together with his brothers, cleared the woods, let the brush dry the necessary amount of time, and then set fire to everything. While hungry flames leaped upward, devouring everything in their path, Adão told

Daniel a story. Some years ago he retold it to me, but I forgot most of the details, so this morning I walked over to Daniel's place and heard it again. Obviously, many of the details and the dialogue which I relate here are imaginary. However, the basic story is true.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As Pedro hurries toward the river, he keeps glancing to his right. The tree is still there. While he watches, he sees the mother parrot hop out of the nest. Just that

quick he sees three small heads in the opening in the log. The mother seems to be encouraging her children to fly. But it's a bit too early. Nature itself tells the little birds that in a day or so, they will be developed enough to leave their nest.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A misunderstanding.

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

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

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

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

Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members,

that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

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

Do we ever do that?

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

How true!

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

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

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

More observations from the US

I mentioned last month about going to a Coop meeting in Newton.

When we parked, we heard a siren wailing in the distance. It kept getting closer, until we saw it was a fire truck. It came right up to where we were about to go in, and parked. Some firemen jumped out and rushed in with their emergency equipment.

What was the problem? Some elderly lady apparently had a fainting spell when she got into the building.

Soon the ambulance got there with more emergency personnel.

All because a lady apparently fainted. Do you know what we would have done here? Tell you next month. ▲

Emma Burns' Diary

Burning Off

["Burning off", as we called it, was a yearly affair when virtually the entire countryside went up in flames. This usually took place over a period of several months. Since the native grass would become tough and the cattle refuse to eat it, ranchers made a point of seeing that their entire spread would go up in smoke.]

Wed–August 27, 69

Our neighbor across the river was burning off. The flames leaped high and created an updraft. We saw animals running and birds flying ahead of the fire, trying to escape. We took our plates of food outside so we could watch the fire. It is so smokey we can

look at the sun without hurting our eyes. The cutter ants ate a lot of my garden. We have to battle with them all the time.

Thu–Aug 28

Denton, Charlie & Faith had gone to Brasília. They arrived home at 4:30 with the Jona Dyck family. Dycks occupied the tent for sleeping. Charlies slept on the dirt floor in our cracker box.

Fri–Aug 29

There are now 16 people in our little house and to cook for. We made pancakes on top of the barrel stove. Some of the bunch went out to get firewood today. Jonas went looking for a place to build a temporary house. He decided to build in our pasture. [I might mention that this house has quite a history, later being used as a church, as a school, and as temporary shelter for different ones who moved down.]

Sat–Aug 30

Jona and Ralph worked on the place where they want to build a house. Charlie got some bricks from Dicks and fixed our outdoor stove. Sure works better now. Denton and Charlie surveyed to make a bica ditch that would run past the house. [This same ditch is still in use.]

Sun–Aug 31

We had services at Dicks. Now we have two ministers and a deacon here. In the afternoon some of us crossed the river on a log and then walked to Pedro Pão's place. We sang for them. They want to learn some songs. Denton and Mary read to them from the Bible. They insisted we stay for supper. We didn't refuse. The meal was delicious.

Mon–Sept 1

Denton, Dick Toews and Jona Dyck went to Goiânia in Dick's truck to get building materials for Jona's house. Charlie built an oven onto the end of our outdoor stove, so we now can bake.

Tue–Sept 2

I went to get some palm branches to shade the plants I transplanted. The sun gets so hot. Dick's boys are making blocks at the river. Today they got 82 made. Carlos, 4, saw Manoel's cattle eating grass close by. He said, "Some of those are cows, but one is a buffalo." Being Brahmans, they have big humps. Charlies, two of Jona's children and Mim and Tim went fishing. We didn't wait on them for supper. We had ostrich with dumplings and butterscotch pudding. We're near the end of the dry season, so it's really dry. There are black whirlwinds all over, loaded with soot from all the fires dot the countryside.

Wed–Sept 3

The boys made 85 blocks today. The children went fishing by the falls. Mary baked a chocolate cake in the dutch oven for Elizabeth's 19th birthday. The older girls walked to John Penners and soon the sun went down. When there is no moon, it gets dark so soon.

Thu–Sept 4

Some from our house and from Jona's went to John Penners in the kombi. It was the first time Yolanda rode in a car since she's here. She just laughed and thought it lots of fun to bounce around. John Penner had gotten poles from the woods and was making them a table. Their house looks real cozy. ▲

This & That

On April 26, volunteers from the Monte Alegre Congregation helped conduct a service in the Evangelical Hospital in Rio Verde.

On the same day, others went to Santo Antônio da Barra, a small town on the way to Goiânia, to sing at the funeral of the 19 year old nephew of Sebastião Passos, of the Monte Alegre C.

Sharon, Mrs. Lester Holdeman, had her tonsils removed.

Tony Koehn, Eileen Koehn's son, spent some time in the hospital.

Laura da Costa moved into Leonard Koepf's house. She will be staying there while they spend a year or so in the US. The youth got together to help get things organized.

On April 2, the Monte Alegre sisters were together for sewing. Each one took her own work. Explain that one.

Ely Bessa and Vânia Martins were married on April 5 in the Rio Verde C.

Carman & Celma Loewen had a boy on April 7. Wallace. Fine little chap.

On March 13th, the Monte Alegre and Rio Verdinho schoolboards took the 7th and 8th graders to the São Simão Hydroelectric installation for their annual field trip.

The rest of the Monte Alegre students had a picnic on the Monte Alegre River where it flows through what is known as Silvestre's fazenda.

All three congregations got together at the Monte Alegre C. on April 8 to hear the Annual Meeting report.

Junior Sewing girls cut blocks for quilts. This is done on shares.

Some kind of a flu has been going around. This is common during the period that we go from the rainy to the dry season.

In the last issue of this little paper (made in the US), I used the term, "living high on the horse." My wife says it's supposed to be "living high on the hog." Obviously I need some touching up in zoology.

Stephen Kramer took my wife and children to meet me at the Goiânia airport.

The youth spent an afternoon doing yardwork at Emma Burns' place.

Brazil News

Our neighbor Doug Ferrell has been attending church regularly since the death of his wife.

Earl & Johanna Schmidt are back from the US, where they attended her mother's funeral.

The dam between Schmidts and Loewens gave way after a heavy rain. Since the road over this dam is a main artery of traffic, and being in the middle of soybean harvest, alternate routes had to be found. Our mayor sent heavy equipment and repaired the dam. At a later date a new overflow will have to be built. Until this is done, the dam will remain empty.

below.

Shortly back issues should be available in N America for those wishing to complete their collection of Brazil News.

Notices will be included in this issue for those whose subscriptions are about to expire.