

Brazil News



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Editorial

Injustice and Compassion

Possibly one of the hardest concepts for our church people to understand is that of injustice. The reason is simple. We seldom experience injustice, and that which isn't learned by experience, isn't usually learned or understood well.

Why do we seldom suffer unjustly? First of all, on a church level, our leaders must be given credit for the caution exercised in dealing with problems. It is true that there are those who feel they have been dealt with unjustly. We certainly wouldn't say this has never happened, but in general, such feelings are probably the result of an offended spirit more than of actual injustice.

On a community level we are known as honest, hard working people. We're good neighbors. People simply have no reason to want to deal unjustly with us. We should be thankful for this.

On a national level, once again we have no reason to complain. We suffer no discrimination, nor domination. A good example would be the attitude of the government toward our parochial schools. We are able to use our own teachers, even though most of them don't have the education considered necessary to teach in public schools.

Then why talk about injustice?

We Mennonites are used to dealing with our equals, or with superiors – but not with the underprivileged masses.

Who are the masses? Probably three, four or even five billion people who populate the face of this earth. They live in a different world than we do. They think differently than we do. They talk differently. They act differently. Therefore they are not subject to the same system or criterion of justice that the rest of the world knows.

Why did communism sprout and flourish to where it covered over half of the earth in less than a century? Did you ever stop to think about that?

Brazil News

Do so now. It's not because it was a superior system. It's not because it's supporters were more intelligent than others (actually, to make it "work" they had to eliminate the intelligentsia). It worked because of a vacuum created by injustice. Social and economical injustice.

We tend to regard Marx and Lenin as diabolical characters. While we must admit they were visionaries without the ability to implant their ideas in a democratic way, it is very possible that their ideas were not born entirely of diabolical machinations. As they saw the suffering masses, those denied social justice, they decided to try and change the world. This they did. For the worse. (Really, what else can one expect of atheists?)

Why did it attract the masses, but not the elite or the solid middle class (which, as mentioned, in many cases was eliminated)? The propagators of communism had a legitimate talking point. The people they addressed were victims of social and economical injustice. What they didn't have was the solution.

Why have unions proliferated in most industrialized nations? We say they are bad, corrupt, communistic. Very likely. But why did they come into existence? Find yourself a history book that zeroes in on the 19th century industrial revolution in Europe and North America and see if you can figure out why they found fertile ground for their ideas.

These are things that are hard to admit. In fact, it sounds almost heretical to suggest that maybe our way of seeing certain problems may be distorted.

The main thrust of the Sermon of the Mount was toward the masses, toward the underprivileged, toward the victims of social injustice, toward the poor. Even a superficial study of the Martyrs Mirror will show that God's people, all through the ages were of this group, despised and rejected by men. Not because they were an inferior people, not because they were less intelligent, and not as a divine punishment for wrongdoings (as many times happened in the Old Testament) – but for righteousness sake.

The Church of God today is no longer a persecuted church. The bulk of the members are not of the masses. Rather we would be identified as solidly middle class. I would be hesitant to use Jesus' words, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!" to mean we can't be middle class. However, we must be a separate class within this middle class. When, and if, this is not the case, we are exposed to the full blast of these words.

It is this very real possibility we want to explore.

What is injustice? Place yourself into the following situation (very, very real for the masses) and imagine your reaction.

You live in a poor section of town. Your little two year old girl gets sick. You get up at five in the morning (hoping to get ahead of the rush) and take her to the government clinic where medical care is free.

After spending an hour on crowded buses, you get there. At least 50 people are already in line. At eight o'clock the clinic opens. Slowly the line moves toward a sullen receptionist. At 10:30, with only two more in front of you, the receptionist, in a voice

Brazil News

totally void of emotion, announces loudly, “That’s all for today!” You protest, “My daughter’s very ill. I’ve been in line since six....” Showing no sign of hearing a word you say, she exits. You return home.

Since you live a long way from the clinic and buses don’t run before five o’clock, you realize it’s going to be hard to get in line early enough to be able to see the doctor. You and your wife do a little planning.

Nine o’clock that evening you take the bus to the clinic. You’ll get ahead of the crowd. When you get there at ten, there are already 26 in line. You spend the night on the sidewalk in front of the building. The next morning at eight o’clock your wife arrives with your little girl – considerably worse. At 11:30 you get to see the doctor. After several questions and a perfunctory examination, he fills out a prescription. Before you can ask a question as to what the problem is with your little girl, the nurse ushers you out as another patient comes in.

You and your wife decide to stop at a pharmacy and buy the medications the doctor prescribed. When you are told what the bill is, you are faced with a new problem. There isn’t enough money for the return bus ticket and the medication the doctor prescribed. You decide that only your wife and child will take the bus. You will walk home (a four hour walk). Even so you are the equivalent of eight American cents short. You begin to explain your plight to the man taking care of you. “I’m eight cents short. Do you suppose I could bring you the money tomorrow...?” Without so much as a word, the man behind the counter has turned his back and is taking care of another customer.

Now what? After a quick conference with your wife, you decide the only open option is to both walk home, taking turns carrying your sick daughter in the hot tropical sun.

Your daughter takes the medication for one day, but she steadily grows worse. The next day it becomes apparent she will have to go to the hospital. A kind neighbor loans you the equivalent of a quarter so you and your wife can take her to the hospital.

Three days later she dies.

Your child wouldn’t have died, because: 1. You wouldn’t have gone to the government hospital, 2. You would have had enough money to pay for the medications, 3. If you wouldn’t have, the people in the pharmacy would have gladly charged, or overlooked, the eight cents you were short, 4. Items two and three don’t really count because you would have been in your car, 5. If your doctor wouldn’t have done a thorough examination, you would have gotten a second opinion, 6. When you took your child to the hospital, she wouldn’t have gone to a ward where, at the best, conditions are extremely precarious, 7. You wouldn’t have had to fight this battle alone. The church would have stood behind you both spiritually and financially.

Have you, my good reader, ever suffered a real injustice? An injustice that cost you a lot? Maybe a life?

Our brother Paulo David (more on him in another article) told me yesterday that the best political party in Brazil is the PT – Partido Trabalhista, a socialist party (more on this too, in the next article). Don’t say bro. Paulo is dumb, because he isn’t. Call him naive, if you will, but his wife just had a baby in a government hospital. He

ought to know. Conclude he's off spiritually, but that would be a political evaluation, wouldn't it?

Why is Paulo David, at heart, a socialist?

Please pay attention to this answer. You may not like it, but pay attention anyway.

Paulo David lives in a dinky little house you wouldn't consider living in. He drives (once in a while when it runs and when he can buy a few liters of fuel) an old car that you would have relegated to the scrap yard a decade ago. He works hard as a teacher – very hard – but barely makes a living. Ever since he was a little boy he has heard politicians promise to correct this situation. And since the socialists have never been in power nationally, he believes that maybe they have the solution to his problem, since their basic platform is social justice. Call him, dumb, naive, or off spiritually. Call him whatever you like, but face it. You have never worn his shoes.

A growing percentage of the Church of God in Christ – Mennonite is made up of people like Paulo David, many of them much, much poorer.

Solomon said, “The rich and poor meet together: The Lord is the maker of them all.”

Compassion. That's what this article is really about. How can we have compassion for a people we don't understand? How can we relate to someone who lives in a different world?

For God's people, this isn't optional. We must understand those to whom we wish to minister. We must have a heart of compassion. In verse 22 Solomon continues, “For the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.” ▲

Politics

Lula

Under our new constitution, presidential elections are held in two stages. Because of our numerous political parties, there can easily be 15 or more candidates – six or seven of them serious contenders with a reasonably good chance to be elected. By law, no one can become president without a majority vote. With so many candidates, it is improbable that anyone will ever get a majority vote. So the first step is to eliminate all but the top two. Approximately a month later, a second election is held to determine who will be president.

In our last election, Lula was Collor's opponent in the second election. Lula's chances for victory were considered very good until Collor got some former girlfriend of his, with whom he had a child, to testify on TV as to what a worthless character Lula was in her eyes (at least after supposedly receiving a handsome sum for the “trouble” of airing her views). He lost by a narrow margin.

Who is Lula?

Born, Luís Inácio da Silva, nicknamed Lula, he became nationally known by this

appellation. In an effort to confer a bit of dignity upon this unusual situation, he had his name legally changed to Luís Inácio Lula da Silva.

When Lula took his place among the citizens of this world, he was of the masses. He acquired an eighth grade education and went to work as a common laborer, working himself up to the position of machinist.

He became involved with labor unions. Doubtlessly this had a strong influence on his socialistic convictions. He rose rapidly through the ranks, becoming head of the union.

Several weeks ago Lula paid the Colony a short visit. The behemoth export company, Cutrale Quintella, that buys a lot of our grain, was taking him on a visit in Goiás and Mato Grosso in their executive jet. Realizing that Lula has a reasonably good chance of becoming president in 94, Cutrale Quintella is “flirting” with him, investing money, just in case he is elected.

The visit to the Colony was to show him what middle class farmers can do. I understand he was quite impressed with what he saw, going so far as to give his phone number with the promise of helping out with any problems that might someday arise here on the Colony – especially in relation to farmers who might someday want to move here from N America.

Those who spoke to him were impressed by his courteous manner and apparent desire to learn.

Lula is a socialist. So what happens if he becomes president? I believe that he is human enough that after he has flown in executive jets for a while, he will at heart become a capitalist, while maintaining a socialistic rhetoric. A good formula. Big business looks on the heart – not the tongue. The masses see the tongue – not the heart.

The basic fear with Lula isn't if he will turn Brazil socialist. It's whether with an eighth grade education he can run a country – something considerably more difficult than running a union. Even though he wears a beard, it's doubtful if he can accomplish what Abraham Lincoln did without a formal education.

Personally, I'm not losing any sleep over it. A lot of water will pass under the bridge before November of next year. ▲

President Itamar

At this point, it appears that President Itamar is playing right into Lula's hands. He is sidling up to the masses with talk of social injustice, of low wages, poor living conditions. Eighty percent of the population believes in him. This is wonderful, except for one thing. Unless he straightens out the economy, where is he going to come up with what it takes to up the people's standard of living?

Until now he has shown no indication of knowing how to handle our inflation, that now is above 30% per month.

It may take another month or so before the three zeros are chopped off of our currency. The president has sent a bill to congress for approval. But since the wheels of congress grind slowly, most Brazilians will continue to be millionaires for a while yet.

This needs to happen fast. For middle class citizens, eight digit calculators don't work to balance a checkbook anymore. If we here were as smart as we are rich, we'd run circles around everyone.

Paulo Haddad, our Minister of Economy, is working on a plan that he hopes will work. A basic item would tie wages, contracts, etc., to the dollar. Then, by controlling the exchange rate, it would be possible – theoretically – to slowly bring inflation down. Theoretically, theoretically, theoretically, theoret



Colonization

The Beginning

Approximately a quarter of a century after the American Colony was established in the Rio Verde area, concrete steps have been taken to start two new settlements in the neighboring state of Mato Grosso.

Two tracts of land have been bought. The Kramers purchased approximately 2,160 acres with the intention of farming; Leo Dirks has purchased 600 acres of pasture land, with the intention of setting up a cattle ranch.

Several other brethren are in Mato Grosso right now hoping to buy land. Others should follow shortly.

I asked them to give a report on what is happening. Dan Kramer has the following to say:

How Do We Prove God's Will?

Brazil News has published articles that have dealt with the need the Colony has for expansion. This often brings the questions: What is God's will? Where would He like to lead us?

I don't claim to have the answers, but would like to relate what has happened in our case so far.

In the beginning of November of 92, I had the opportunity of visiting the Sorriso, Mato Grosso area together with two other brethren and a local businessman who owns land there.

I found that most of my unfavorable preconceived ideas of that area had no foundation. Rather, to say the very least, I was favorably impressed.

Since that first trip, I have been back to the area four times with different ones. In each instance there was an effort made to locate an area that would suit our need. It looked for a while as if things might not work out. Most places were either too big, or if a decent size, out of our price range.

On the 11th of February my brother John and his wife Sheila, and I set out on an

extended trip to check out a different area. It was our intention to see how it compared with the Sorriso area. We found a lot of nice ground, some of it even better than the land at Sorriso. But in the end, we were drawn back to Sorriso because of it being more accessible.

After some more looking, we found an area, previously overlooked, that seemed to fit the bill. After returning home, presenting our findings to the rest of the family and discussing it at length, we decided to launch out in faith, hoping that others will join us in this venture.

Land in the area where we bought costs from US\$28 to \$50 per acre, depending on improvements. I do not expect these low land prices to last very long.

The distance to the nearest village, which is Boa Esperança, is 45 miles. The closest larger town is approximately a hundred miles to the southeast. Sorriso is 140 miles to the northwest. These distances are by existing roads. Once more direct roads are built, these distances will be considerably less. The elevation of the area is around 1,600 feet. The climate compares to that of the Rio Verde area, with possibly 20% more rain, which puts it in the one hundred inches per year range. ▲

Linguistics

A Child Shall Lead Them

When Isaiah said that “a little child shall lead them,” he doubtlessly wasn’t thinking of language study. Even so, it certainly is an apt description of what we here will call the Isaiah Method of learning a foreign language.

This method can be almost embarrassing.

John and Sally Doe, with their two little children, ages 3 and 6, go to the mission field. They begin an intensive language course. Day after day they swelter in a humid 90° classroom. Sometimes sweat is mixed with tears. After two months of it, one night, after going to bed, John dourly remarks to Sally, “Dear, if the Mission Board had the policy of giving prospective missionaries an IQ test, we wouldn’t be here, would we?”

(While dad and mom agonize, Willie, 6, and Lizzie, 3, play on the street with the neighbor children.)

Worse is the next day when John decides to go to the market to buy a few vegetables. Willie says, “Dad, may I go with you?”

As John and Willie go from booth to booth buying potatoes, carrots, eggs, the amount of people crowding around to watch their every move is directly proportional to the purchases made. They are enchanted by John’s six foot stature, by his blond hair, by his enormous hands and feet, and most of all, by his natural ability to articulate funny sounds when he tries to speak their language. The street urchins look at each other and sagaciously nod their heads when he says something particularly

unintelligible. Courteous, they save their laughs for later, when seated in a circle, they will take turns attempting to “speak” like the foreigner does.

The last purchase made, John breaths a sigh of relief and heads toward the car.

And then it happens.

The lady he bought the eggs from comes running, shouting excitedly. In her hand she has a little basket with a dozen eggs. She talks a blue streak, gesturing wildly with her free hand. John is unable to utter even his customary unintelligible sounds. Flight is impossible. Everyone, customers and vendors, now surround him. The booths are all empty. By the look on their faces, it is obvious they are enjoying the show immensely. A free show.

Seeing her customer’s incomprehension, the egg seller becomes almost desperate. Others join in, magnanimously trying to assist. After several minutes of this, John feels someone tugging on his arm. It’s Willie. By the slightest trace of a smirk on his face, it is evident that even he is enjoying himself. Shouting to make himself heard, he says, “Dad, that lady wants to trade eggs with you. She says her little boy got them from under a hen that has been setting on them for 20 days...”

A child shall lead them.

Really, it doesn’t make sense. John and Sally spend long hours each day slumped over books, laboriously learning the past tense of the third person plural in the indicative voice of the verb cantar. They turn their eyes heavenward as they desperately twist their tongue in an effort to pronounce the unpronounceable.

But outside, sitting on the curb, Willie and Lizzie are having the time of their life with their friends. No dictionaries. No text books. No conscious memorizing. No big deal pronouncing the words their friends use. They can’t understand everything yet, but by the time they have been there six or eight months, they will have acquired a good vocabulary and will be speaking without an accent.

It’s just not fair.

I have wondered if there isn’t some way that we couldn’t pick up at least a few pointers for adults from the Isaiah Method of learning a foreign language. You missionaries who have been through this and know exactly what I’m talking about, probably have too.

Paulo David doesn’t speak English. Sometimes he mashes up a Portuguese word and thinks he is. The Mission Board has hired him to teach the new missionary couple, Arlen & Carol Friesen, to speak Portuguese.

Paulo David is actually part Arab. So far as his physical attributes, they can be gleaned from his own version of what he looks like. He is a born teacher. And if ever there has been someone endowed with the ability to use the Isaiah Method, it is he.

After three weeks of study, Arlen & Carol heard him preach a sermon in the town congregation. In Portuguese. They understood most of what he said.

Obviously, they understand their own teacher much better than they understand others. Furthermore, he stuck to one subject all the way through his sermon. It’s true that he speaks with a very clear voice, that his facial expressions and gesticulations all aid in understanding.

But, even so, after less than a month on the field, to understand most of what he said, tells us something.

It tells us that Paulo David is using an unusual method of teaching. The Isaiah Method?

I sat in on several of his classes. Since he doesn't speak English, he has to make himself understood in Portuguese. This he does by repetition. He asks, "Entenderam?" ("Did you understand?") If this is greeted by a perplexed look, or a simple "Não," he changes his approach. He mimics. He draws on the chalkboard. He jumps up. He walks around. He leaves the room. He smiles. He frowns. He sings. He repeats and repeats and repeats and repeats...

His ability to suddenly be seated in the driver's seat of an imaginary car, to imitate the noise of the starter, to put it in gear, to accelerate, to drive down the road, or – as he illustrated to me once – what a starter sounds like when the battery is shot, and his version of what Arlen looks like when this happens to be his car (another lesson on *ser* and *estar*), simply is fabulous.

I was absolutely amazed at the depth of his lessons. You Portuguese and Spanish speaking readers know the agony that the *ser*, *estar* verbs can cause the American who is accustomed to reducing everything to "is" or "are." I saw the man explaining the concept of these two verbs in a most intelligent way. Repeatedly he would thrust his hand into his pocket. Each time it would come out empty. Since *ser* is a permanent concept, he would repeat, "Meu bolso é vazio." He would go on to explain that since his pocket is always empty, *é* (from *ser*) was the correct verb. Then the situation changed. Usually he had something in his pocket. But on one occasion it was empty, a temporary thing, so, "Meu bolso está vazio." Now *estar* was the correct verb to be used.

Tremendous. We have people on the Colony who have been here 15 years and still don't know if their pocket *é* or *está* empty. Maybe because it never is.

I mentioned that I am watching this whole situation with intense interest. I think we may have a few things to learn from Paulo David about the Isaiah Method of teaching a foreign language. Stay tuned in. ▲

A Brazilian Story

The Rotten Beam

[Mário de Moraes tells this story. I might explain that the beam he talks about is very likely an unsawed timber, possibly eight to twelve inches in diameter. Years ago it was common practice on the "fazendas" to build roofs with unsawed lumber.]

My reader, Celino de Oliveira, tells me he heard his dad tell this story, who is to actually have witnessed what happened. It sounds sort of far out to me, but since I don't have the practice of doubting the stories my readers send in, here goes.

In that long ago year, Celino lived on a fazenda in the municipality of Igreja Nova, in the state of Alagoas [ex-president Collor's home state]. His nearest neighbor, a landholder with an enormous spread, lived pretty much alone. When I say pretty much alone – he was a widower – it's because his only son was very poor company. He preferred the agitated city life, where he could enjoy wine, women and song in constant and expensive parties.

The young man was an authentic good-for-nothing, not any better or any worse than the good-for-nothings we still have around today. His main activity in life was to burn up the “old man's” money as fast as possible. He only would come out to the fazenda when his pockets were empty. He derisively referred to these visits as “refueling.” Worse, he always brought along his noisy friends, waking up his dad in the middle of the night.

“Wake up, old man! I brought out some friends to have a party.”

What was the party about? Even he didn't know. He would go to the pantry, get out the best whiskey and cheeses made on the fazenda, plus the best of anything else he could find. The party wouldn't stop until they were all in a drunken stupor.

One day, when the boy's dad was 85 years old, he called in his good-for-nothing son to have a talk with him. Seated on the edge of the bed, aggravated because of having been called in, he listened to some fatherly counsel from the one who was about to leave this life.

“Son, I feel that my time is at hand to depart this life. I wasn't able to make a man out you like I had hoped. Life for you can be summed up in wine, women and song. When I am gone, I already know that you will continue in the company of your same worthless friends. You won't stay away from the saloons and night houses. And I won't be here anymore to give you money for your life of partying. So you'll end up selling what I have accumulated through the years with a lot of hard work. When you have gone through what I have, when you don't have a single cent to your name anymore, then, my son, you will come face to face with the truth...”

The old man took a deep breath and continued.

“This will be a terrible experience. When your friends see you are broke, they will leave you. You will no longer be welcome in the saloons and the night houses where you have thrown away your money. You will become depressed, frustrated and will know what it means to be all alone. This will cause you to think about suicide. All this will happen, because I happen to know how you despise the very thought of work. You consider it a waste of time. And beside all this, you don't know how to run this fazenda.

“Now, my son, pay attention to what I am about to say. In the shed where I keep the machinery, there is a long beam that runs from one end to the other of the shed. I have tied a rope to that beam. At the other end there is a noose. When you feel that all is lost, that you no longer have a single friend left to rescue you, don't go out on the streets begging for bread. The least you can do is have a dignified

end. Hang yourself on the rope I have left for you and do away with your useless life.

The impact of these strange words jarred the young man and for the first time he had a rational thought.

“Mercy, Dad! (he even forgot to call him “old man.”) You’re really pessimistic about me. But don’t worry. This won’t come to pass.”

Unfortunately, everything happened exactly like his dad predicted. A few months later he suffered a fatal heart attack. All of his holdings fell into the hands of his good-for-nothing son. Not having the slightest idea of how to run the fazenda, he became desperate. He cleaned out all of his dad’s bank accounts, sold what could be readily sold, and drowned himself in drink and immorality.

One day he awoke and realized he didn’t have so much as a nickel to spend. Seeing he was broke, his false friends evaporated into thin air. When he would meet one of them and try to ask for help, they would simply turn their back and walk on. He went on a drinking spree. When the last bottle of whiskey was emptied, he remembered what his dad had told him about the shed with the large beam. With slow steps he went to the shed. Sure enough, there was the rope hanging from the beam. He found a chair, got up on it, tightened the noose around his neck, and, after saying a quick little prayer, kicked the chair out from under himself. The rope snapped tight and for several seconds he hung in the air.

Suddenly there was a terrible noise and the place filled with dust. The beam broke and the good-for-nothing found himself lying on the floor. Uninjured. Small metallic objects kept falling around him, some of them striking him. Then a piece of paper came fluttering down.

The metallic objects that fell were gold coins. Many of them. Removing the noose from his neck, the boy read the note, written in his dad’s handwriting: “You have just learned a hard lesson, my son. I know that from now on out you will place more value on money and will choose your friends with more care. Get with it! Gather up all the gold pieces. With them you can begin a new life.”

Celino de Oliveira ends his letter to me like this, “From that day on, the boy began to use his head. He eventually became a prosperous industrialist in the Northeast.”

Emma Burns’ Diary

Moving In

Fri – Nov 21, 69

Some men came to help pour our floor. Homer Unruh and John Unruh ran the cement mixer. Myron and Danny Kramer screened sand to remove impurities. Daniel Kramer spread the cement. Curtis Kramer did the troweling. Everyone was busy. We troweled green coloring in so that the floor would be green. We had to eat in shifts to keep things going. They finished after dark. Daniel wanted to

hear us sing English, Spanish and Portuguese to keep their spirits up, so that is what we did.

Sat – Nov 22

Daniel borrowed our cart to try out his horse. It seems to be stubborn like ours. The girls are very anxious to move into our new house. There were people here all day. Jona, Doris and girls came to see our house. Dan Coblentzes went for a ride in their jeep. It was Samuel's 11th birthday, so I gave him a big cup of cafezinho [the strong Brazilian coffee]. Now the other boys can hardly wait for their birthdays to come so they can get their cup of coffee.

Mon – Nov 24

We got the temporary walls up for the bedrooms. We tacked bags on the windows. We roll them up during the day and put them back down for the night, or when it rains. The men had a business meeting this evening in our new house to settle up on the trip to Brasília. Everyone was tired. Enos Miller and Daniel Kramer fell asleep.

Tue – Nov 25

While we were stomping clothes, the pig got out and chewed up some of the clothes. I took Denton's coveralls and washed them in the river. Daniel Kramer is putting up a pole shed to put their tent under. I made tea and cooled it in the spring. Everyone enjoyed the "cool" drink. Curtis and Dennis Kramer got their first letter from their Mom. Where they happy!

Wed – Nov 26

I fried squash for breakfast. It took a long time because so many people kept coming in. Hazel Unruh, Joan Unruh, Elizabeth and I painted walls in our new house. Charlie, John and Homer got the footer poured for Charlie's house. Mim, Tim, Jonathan and Sam Coblentz worked on the pig pen most of the day. Doris Dyck sent us some fresh biscuits and jam. It was delicious.

Thu – Nov 27

Hazel, Elizabeth and Mary scrubbed the floors in our new house. Then they heated paraffin and mixed it with floor wax and kerosene. They waxed all the floors with this mixture. After they buffed the floors, they really looked nice. Denton and I slept in our new house for the first time tonight. My, it seemed nice to have a house again. [More than 25 years later, Mom continues to live in this same house. Maybe there's a reason it seems like home to her.]

Fri – Nov 28

We were moving all day and getting settled in our new house. We all took naps after dinner. It's so nice and cool in here. ▲

Remembering Out Loud

Carrefour

When we walk into a Carrefour hypermarket here in Brazil, we can sort of imagine we are in Wal-Mart. These discount stores, run by a French group, are found in most large Brazilian cities.

Carrefour hypermarkets are enormous and very well organized. When Sam Walton was in Brazil a number of years ago, he visited at least one of these hypermarkets, taking notes on his yellow notepad.

Just to get an idea of their size, the store in Brasília has 107 checkout counters. While tied up at the American Consulate, before leaving for the US in December, we decided to buy a few items one evening. There must have been thousands of people in the store. Every single checkout counter had a line at least a half hour long.

Even though we had purchased just a few small items, we realized we were doomed to a half-hour-plus purgatory, the same as the folks who filled two or three carts.

We had stood in line for just a minute or so when a man next to the check out counter motioned for me to come up to where he was. Who was this total stranger? What did he want? He explained that his wife was in the next line. Since they both made it to the check out counter at the same time, he would take his things to her and we could have his place. To this day I don't know why he gave us his place, except...

Except that Faith told me afterwards that the day before she and Sylvia had done the same thing in another store. It was just about Faith's turn to check out. She saw a woman with a splitting headache who was at the end of the line, so she gave her her place at the head of the line and went over to where Sylvia was. Would that be it?

O Homem da Cobra

(In Portuguese, "The snake man.")

Civilization is a funny thing. We used to have a lot of snakemen come to Rio Verde. But, as civilization moved in, they moved out. I assumed they were becoming extinct. But one day several years ago Mark Loewen and I were right in the middle of the commercial center of São Paulo where all the big banks are located. Along side of one of the skyscrapers we saw a big bunch of people intently watching something. We went to see what the center of attraction was. It was an homem ("an", because the "h" is silent) da cobra.

To understand what an homem da cobra is (was?), let's watch him as he goes into action. We'll call our man Pedro.

Pedro got into town last evening on the 10:00 bus. He spent the night in a cheap pensão (poor people's hotel). Since this was his first visit to Rio Verde, he spent the morning scouting the town. In the process, he made friends with a 14 year old boy, promising him a few cruzeiros if he would spend the next several days being his helper. Múcio, we'll call him.

Pedro and Múcio went back to the pensão and had lunch. All the while the homem da cobra entertained his new helper with tales of his travels, which are many. Also, he gave him instructions as to what his function will be in the afternoon activities.

“Entendeu?” he asks.

“Entendi.”

“Então vamos.”

Each one is carrying a well filled cardboard box on his shoulder. But most important is a large black satchel the homem da cobra is carrying in his hand.

Getting to the Praça Central (main plaza), Pedro goes directly to the place picked out in his morning reconnaissance. Recognizing the distinct look of the homem da cobra, a crowd begins to gather, even as he begins to open his boxes and spread out the contents on a somewhat soiled sheet spread on the ground. But most of all, people – especially children – cast furtive glances at the black satchel. No one will get near.

Even as the homem da cobra is stooped over unpacking his boxes, he is sizing up his crowd. From one of the boxes he pulls out a curious looking gadget. It’s a pre-historic forerunner of the little microphones that important people pin on their lapels in talk shows. This one is a crude yoke that fits around his neck. At the end is a microphone with a rag wrapped around it. A wire runs down to the box. He fiddles with the buttons. He taps the rag. He says, “Um, dois, três...um dois três.” “Testing, testing,” in other words.

All the while the crowd increases. Pedro stands up. Making sure his black satchel is safely at his side, he begins speaking with a strong accent, indicating he is from the northeast. He tells a story. Suddenly he stoops down, way down, and says something to whatever is in the black satchel. The crowd watches in awe. It’s hard to know if the homem da cobra or the satchel is the center of attraction. People glance back and forth as he speaks.

He tells them about an electric eel that lives way up the Amazon River. Because of the high voltage electrical discharges these eels give off – enough to kill a cow – they are extremely difficult to catch. Why catch them? Because their liver (or whatever) when dehydrated and ground to powder, makes a medicine that cures arthritis, bursitis, tonsillitis, pancreatitis, and every other itis, real or imagined, that any human being might possibly have. The cardboard boxes are filled with little vials of this powerful powder.

The crowd becomes restless. They are more interested in the black satchel than in the contents of the boxes. Sensing this, the homem da cobra taps the black satchel with the tip of his shoe. He leaps back several feet. He mutters to himself in a stage whisper, *Está com raiva* (she’s mad).

People move back one step, but crane their necks forward to make up for the distance lost. Now, with a vial in his hand, the homem da cobra begins to tell of people who were cured of the most terrible diseases with this gray powder.

Now and then he spices up his lingo with off color jokes, carefully tailored to the type of audience he is playing.

Pedro's sales pitch is picking up in volume. Múcio, his helper, is circulating in the crowd with little vials of the gray powder, selling to anyone who will dish out the cruzeiros.

Pedro's sharp eye notices a few people drifting away. No problem. He suddenly turns all his attention to the black satchel. Ever so carefully he opens the lid – just a crack. A hissing sound is heard. The crowd shrieks. Those who were drifting off come running back. Others come running too. Pedro shuts the lid and places his foot on top of the black satchel. “She's mad!” he says in a husky voice. “She's really mad.”

Again his voice raises, praising the virtues of dried electric eel liver. “It cures eeeeeverything, folks!”

Pedro mentally counts the number of vials Múcio is selling. Once again his voice drifts off. His eyes are riveted on the black satchel. He is going through some kind of a ritual, speaking through the lid which he has again opened just a crack. Is he exorcising the serpent?

Another sales pitch.

This time Pedro dramatically asks the crowd to stand back just a bit. Seeing he is messing with the lid of the black satchel, everyone cheerfully obliges. Speaking non-stop in soft tones, he begins to thrust his hand into the black satchel. Men turn pale. Women gasp. Children hold their breath. Removing his hand, he announces, “She's better. Pretty soon I can handle her.”

Múcio pockets the money from another 47 vials of dried electric eel liver.

Pedro is a professional. He knows about how long he can play this game without the crowd becoming nasty. This time, with the usual dramatics, he slowly puts his hand in the black satchel. As he pulls it back out, there is something in his hand. Something alive. The crowd shrieks. A dozen people who couldn't quite decide if they would join the crowd, make a positive decision.

A loud thump from inside the satchel (or Pedro's shoe) causes him to suddenly release what he is holding. Standing upright, he says, “That was a close one.” People shudder.

Another 64 vials are sold.

Pedro knows the time has come to thrust the sword deep into the bull's neck. After all, there is a limit to how long you can hold a crowd. Speaking soothingly to the black satchel, this time he suddenly stands up, an ENORMOUS snake in his hands. Enormous? Not really. An enormous snake wouldn't fit into a black satchel. But it certainly is enormous to the lookers-on. Enormous as he casually drapes it around his neck.

Another 74 vials are sold.

That night in the pensão, Múcio listens raptly as his new friend tells him about the marvels of Santos, where huge ships from all nations in the world are tied up at the wharves.

This & That

Juanita Isaac from Canada spent several weeks visiting her sister Corinne, who is teaching in the Monte Alegre School.

Laura da Costa is teaching in the school on Doug Ferrell's fazenda, where his worker's children study.

Ministers Robert Toews and Roland Loewen held revival meetings at the Rio Verdinho and Rio Verde congs.

The Monte Alegre revivals began on February 26, with ministers Roger Unruh and Wayne Amoth.

Tim & Deanna Burns got back from the States after attending their son Darrin's wedding.

Crist & Anita Stoltzfus and daughter Veronica are spending five weeks with his brother Elias.

The old song says, "One road leads to London, one road leads to Rome..." From what I hear, it would be a good idea if some of the folks from the Colony who go to Brasília would sing, before returning home, "One road leads to Goiânia, one road leads to Belo Horizonte..." and then follow up with, "Which way shall I take...?" Huh Elias?

A little girl was born in Rio Verde on August 19. The mother was unable to give her proper care, so when Bill & Gracie picked her up at the Conselho Tutelar in town in December, she weighed just seven and a half pounds, inspite of being three and a half months old. Today Joycelyn Ann is a healthy little girl. Adoption procedures have been started.