

One Foot in Front of the Other...

It's a steep climb, I think about 70 degree incline - a little less than an upright ladder but way more than a set of stairs. Then you make the sharp corner to the left, trying hard to avoid the three woodscrews sticking out of the banister that have come out of their fittings in the wall. This is the loft where Luciano maintains his computer school as I have described to you before.

Immediately you are greeted by the warm embrace of the men and women that comprise the "church" in Bugio. I say that tongue in cheek, because as of yet none of them have submitted to Christ in baptism to have their sins washed away. (Please keep praying for them) And yet, there is a comradeship that I wouldn't have expected from non-christians.

This is the group that has gone through the plan of salvation study on Friday nights with me last spring (that would be fall for you), so they do have a perfunctory grasp of the plan of God and purpose of Christ's sacrifice.

Most were Catholic or Pentecostal-we do have an atheist that is intrigued by the teachings of Christ, but they are all united here this Sunday morning by a fascination that the church could be so different that what they could have possibly imagined or even heard of.

They are united by spiritual weariness of "religiosidade" or in English, religiosity. The Catholics among them would describe it to you as a tiredness of rhetoric without the wholesomeness of day to day spiritual life. The Pentecostals describe it as a tiredness of spiritual emotionalism devoid of substance. There is a hunger for the word; a hunger to live Christ, not just talk about Him.

At the same time I also realize a danger inherent in this group. They love me and they love Marie as Americans who have taken an interest in them. Luciano says that he has never seen this kind of transparency and genuine love in anyone before. And that is frightening to me. I know my own dark secrets and selfish manifestations.

On the other hand, I remember what the apostle Paul said, I am what I am not because of myself, but what Christ through His Spirit is manifesting in me. He deserves the glory and respect. I must point them toward the Christ that I am only so dimly reflecting.

In that vein of thinking, I have shifted my Friday night bible study with them to be a small group that is internalizing the teachings and Life of Christ. Step by step we are inching towards Jerusalem and the Cross-maybe there to see again the manifest glory of God and truly sacrificial live.

But this is Sunday morning, and as much as I enjoy the sincerity of the warm hugs, my soccer jersey is starting to stick to my back and sides and the perspiration forces us apart. It's 86\* here in the shade and it's not even 10 o'clock yet. Nailton clicks

over the switch for the ceiling fan and it whirs to life. Thank goodness Luciano has fixed that!

At the same time I have to smile. Last week I taught them the meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper. How, among other things, it's designed to promote unity and reflection within the "church". A man who eats the Lord's Supper without perceiving the needs of the rest of the members body, eats and drinks condemnation on himself.

My smile is not lost on him as I nod in understanding. Nailton suffers terribly from allergies and when the ceiling fan is on his eyes and nose are so irritated he has to hold a small hand towel in front of his face to wipe away the tears.

He grins broadly. I've reached him.

I have taken a different tack with this group. Every Sunday, we have opened up the Word and looked at the community of believers and how they lived and met together. A different aspect every week.

So far we have talked about the edifying purity and significance of singing acapella to one another. Pamela confesses that she misses the energy of the bongos and electric keyboard of her old church, but now sings with a voice unmasked and unrepressed in albeit broken harmony with Luana's quiet alto.

We've talked about the communicative nature of prayer. Laying out petitions before God and one another. Making intercession for others. And this morning, Luciano, a man who has never prayed any other prayer than "Hail Mary", or, "Our Father" form prayers, kneels and prays about everything he can think of and opens our "reuniao" or re-union as the call it.

Today I'm talking about the importance and difference between teaching and preaching. That every man should come with a word of instruction to present from his own private studies. Gean and Evanildo's eyes flash-they love to talk. Now I'm going to have to demonstrate and privately teach the men how to organize their thoughts to make a cohesive presentation.

Next week I plan to teach about the generosity that God inspires in us. So many questions, there is so much to teach, but I guess it can't all happen in one day. Step by step, a beautiful communion is naturally taking shape. It's not perfect, but it is a joy to be a part of.

Next week we'll leave the fan off. Keep praying. God is answering!

Watching the Son rise in Aracaju -rob

## He has Done Marvelous Things

Some exciting things have been happening already this year. In January we were the first congregation planned to host an Area-Wide Ladies Day. I feel like we planned and worked on this event all month. On the day of the gathering everything went basically as we had hoped except that I showed up early to decorate and right as everyone was arriving I realized that I did not bring my camera. Hahahaha Just one of those little details that slipped through the cracks. Of course this year I didn't have Morwyn as my artist/worker bee but it all worked out anyway.

I tried something new and had Dona Cicera teach me how to make the traditional Brazilian party snacks instead of her make them for us. She worked so hard for us and we had enough food for an army of women. I tried to stretch Líbia by asking her to give the lesson this time instead of me and she rose to the occasion beautifully. Our goal with this event is to create and solidify relationships among women from other congregations and to encourage each other as well. I truly believe that we accomplished this with our first "Encontro" (Big Encounter) of the year.

Please keep the women of Aracaju in your prayers as we are already talking about our Women's Retreat this year which we hold in October. I know that God will do wonderful things through our unity and our spirit of sisterly love.

Another exciting event this year is that we decided to go ahead and start meeting on Sunday mornings in the neighborhood of Bugio even though we don't have a building rented yet. We are using the building where Luciano has his computer school, "Lusoft." It fits us nicely right now the only snag is a very steep ladder that you have to climb to get into the building. Not many elderly people could make the climb. We are going to find another location to rent in that neighborhood. In the mean time, we have such a family atmosphere in this group. It is a joy to be around them.

Rob's Friday night Bible study in Bugio averages 15-20 people per week and we had an American hot-dog fest the Friday before I left for California.

Things are going well. Rob has another wonderful study started in the neighborhood near the Federal University of Sergipe here in Aracaju. Men in this study already travel to another small town near here called Itapuranga to teach others what they are learning with Rob. Rob is going out to visit them in Itapuranga next Saturday and I am excited about what will come from this study. God is doing something amazing here. I sit on the edge of my seat in anticipation. Please keep us in your prayers. I will be traveling to spend March with Amber before the wedding. I love you all!!

Marie

## Area-Wide Ladies Day 2010

Last year the ladies of each congregation here in Aracaju decided that we needed an Area-Wide Ladies Day. Each congregation hosted one of these special gatherings. We had three of them in 2009. This year we are happy to say there are FIVE of these events planned. Once again each congregation will host a Ladies Day.

Our month happened to be January. I am proud of the way we all pulled together and planned and hosted this first Ladies Day of 2010. Líbia was our speaker and she did a wonderful job. I feel so much joy as I watch her share her love of God's word with others.

It was a fun afternoon of sharing our mutual faith, encouraging one another and Christian fellowship. I am grateful for the unity that we enjoy among the congregations here in Aracaju and I want to thank you for your prayers in this area. God is truly blessing us.

May God receive all the glory for all that we do!!