

# **CHRONICLE**

**INTERIM  
IN  
SERVICE-LEARNING  
TO  
BRAZIL 1991**

## BRAZIL CHRONICLE

by Gina Armstrong

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Editor's Note: The following chronicle was initially written with the idea of making the chronicle one with pictures. Thus the prose was written to go along with visual images of the experience of the Service-Learning Interim to Juiz de Fora, Brazil. Budgeting constraints, however, have kept us from printing in the way we wanted to, but we wanted the team members to have the chronicle nonetheless. This chronicle is, however, being placed in a scrapbook which will contain photos of the event, and that scrapbook will be a part of Yeilding Chapel.

Chapter 1: "The Beginning....if we had only known"

The day it started was a pretty ordinary one in March, windy and somewhat chilly, which made standing in line outside rather unpleasant. We stood around chatting, dreaming actually, about getting a letter of acceptance, about joining a hack squad of T.W.I.T.S. - Technical Wizards in Training for Service - and jetting away to exotic Brazil. We were not alone. Over 80 people stood outside that day, waiting for the opportunity of a lifetime - vying for 21 places on a plane ride to paradise. Paradise, in service-learning lingo, however, has a very different meaning than in civilian speak. If we had only known...

Chapter 2: "A Team Is Born"

After enduring many long hours of labor, our illustrious officers and advisors gave birth to a miracle: a balanced (or close enough) team of TWITS, including Deadheads and Duckheads and everything in between.

We met for the first time, staring around the room, basically doubting that we would ever coalesce this eclectic band into a loving, working group. That's the first thing we learned about service-learning--Never doubt the judgement of your leaders.

### Chapter 3: "You Going Out After The Meeting?"

Beginning in September, every Friday at 4:00 p.m. the team would gather in Olin 104 for our weekly meetings. At these meetings we discussed the essentials of service-learning: how to say diarrhea in Portuguese, how to play Bafa Bafa, and how we were going to get the money to go to Brazil.

During this time we learned a lot about each other and about Brazil. Each team member was required to give a presentation on some aspect of Brazil. The presentations were as diverse as the team, ranging from history/economics/politics to what animals we should watch out for. Some presentations were so good we got to hear them twice or had to wait weeks for them to come into being.

Meetings were at first something that cut into our social time on Fridays but gradually became the one thing we could count on besides death and taxes. Through these meetings we became a team, able to face our greatest challenges: fall retreat, shots, and ultimately Brazil.

### Chapter 4: "Call Me Stucco"

While most students spent fall break camping or at the beach one last time until spring, we, the TWITS, travelled in a torrential downpour to Upper Sand Mountain Parish for a preparatory work retreat.

While in Upper Sand Mountain, we worked at the cannery in various capacities, including stuccoing two and one-half walls of

the building, sanding and painting primer on the trim, hanging a suspended ceiling, and painting polyurethane on the floor of a private home built for low-income families by the Parish. We learned our first lessons in community: how to take direction from Frank, the one-verse-of-"Kum-Ba-Yah"-shower, letting (or not) others sleep, and that Carlton avoids work. We learned more about each other than we probably wanted to know and we got our first taste of serving together.

A highlight of the trip was the visit to the Amy Hunter Hall of Fame in Fort Payne, Alabama, aka Amy Hunter's family home. The Hunters opened their hearts and home to us, listened to stories of the day's work, and fed us a wonderful meal. The Hunters' hospitality turned out to be a foreshadowing of what would happen in Brazil.

#### Chapter 5:        " 'Leavin' On A Jet Plane' "

After months of preparation, we left school for Christmas vacation full of anticipation of the month ahead. We reconvened on January 4 for our final team meeting, discussing last minute details, and plans for departure. That night, we were commissioned at the Sending-Forth Service by Dr. Mickey Morgan, family and friends watching, as we, our hats, boots, and pepto bismol were blessed.

We met the next morning in Snavelly for packing day, arriving with our bags stuffed with "necessities," where we filled them with

all the tools, medicine, and clip-on bears we could carry. We also received our last shots - the only Gamma Globulin left in the country not reserved for Persian Gulf soldiers. We received final embarkation instructions and were instructed to be at the airport promptly in the morning.

Of course, some of us didn't make it. We arrived at the airport, surrounded by an entourage of well-wishers and baggage, and took up a considerable chunk of the tiny airport space standing around waiting for late arrivers. Finally, they rushed in, and we received the command to go to the gate. When there, we had enough time for small talk, pictures, and emotional goodbyes before we boarded the plane for paradise. We were finally on our way...

#### Chapter 6:       " 'Welcome To Brazil' "

After a brief visit to the Nashville airport and a passport scare in Miami, and 18 hours after leaving Birmingham, we arrived in Rio do Janeiro. We were met (after gathering our luggage, gaining entry, and sailing through customs) by Rev. Jim Goodwin, several members of St. Matthew's Church, and a bus - a chartered bus, no less - which was heaven compared to what we had expected. This bus, however, contained what was to become our worst nightmare - the combination of Jim and a P.A. System.

We proceeded on a two and a half hour bus trip through the mountains north to Juiz de Fora (or what we thought was Juiz de Fora). It was actually the barrio of São Geraldo, where we would

spend the next two weeks. The bus came to a stop in front of iron gates, behind which stood, atop a hill paved with uneven stone, a plain, turquoise-colored building. We were asked to unload our bags and were informed that this building, a Catholic church/seminary, is where we would sleep, take showers, and have team meetings.

After unloading the bus, we re-boarded and were taken two miles away to the very edge of the barrio, where the bus stopped. Behind more iron gates (seems to be a theme here) was a courtyard/parking lot and a pool. We were told that this is where we would take our meals. This is the Third World?

When we asked our hosts where we would be working, they pointed up a hill - mountain - behind the building we were in, which turned out to be a union club rented for the weekdays for us. Fortunately, it would be tomorrow before we had to face THE HILL.

Later that night, we boarded the bus again and rode to the club for dinner - our first meal of beans and rice - and then took a scenic ride into the real Juiz de Fora. We rode past the McDonald's, up a mountain to a place not unlike Vulcan, where you could see the entire city - a city of about 700,000 people. Shocking for what we expected.

## Chapter 7: "Week 1: Stranger In A Strange Land"

The next morning came early - about 6:00. We loaded up with hats and sunscreen, repellent and tools, put our boots on and

started walking to the club. The walk was a scenic and noxious one - through open sewers, past bakeries and kids in flip-flops, and people and houses. We nearly lost half the team to the first #139 bus that rolled around a blind curve over a hill going 60 m.p.h., spewing fumes and splashing mud. And that scene was repeated until we left São Geraldo - sometimes we had teammates on those buses (once we figured out the schedule), but you never knew if one was going to whip around the corner and attack.

The construction team (who had decided the night before to dig foundations) started up THE HILL after breakfast with all the tools, while the medical team waited at the club for instructions and explored the area. By the time we broke for lunch, the construction team had sifted three piles of dirt for bricks, cleared the foundation area, and cleaned up the scattered dirt from a foundation already laid. The medical team still didn't know what they were going to be doing. The day finished up after four more hours of work for the construction team and an introduction to running a clinic for the medical team.

After dinner, we were treated to our first Brazil night. We were shown a movie about the Brazilian version of the debt crisis. The movie was interesting and showed that there are two sides to every coin, but a movie was probably not the ideal thing to see after eight hours of manual labor to which we were not accustomed. Needless to say, it was a nice nap for some of us.

We trudged back to the seminary after the movie, took our much needed showers, and headed off to bed.



The next morning, bright and early, we awakened to the soothing sounds of rain. Soothing, that is, if you can skip your classes and lie in bed all day. We got out of bed, suited up in raingear (of course) and trudged to the club. The walk was much harder today, since we wimpy college students were actually using those muscles Frank told us to exercise. When we arrived at the club, a decision was made for the construction team not to work until the rain stopped. The medical team opened the clinic, but had few patients. We waited around, played bochi ball, and were generally tired and lazy. Finally, fifteen minutes before lunch, the rain stopped. We had lunch and the construction team headed straight up THE HILL, while members of the medical team either headed up with us, worked in the clinic, or went with translators into the favellas, or slums, that made up Sao Geraldo. For those who had this experience, both on the construction and medical teams, it would rank as one of the high points of the trip. We were taken on a stroll through the barrio we walked by every morning, and had the opportunity to enter people's homes and speak with them. The people we spoke to were mostly women, since the men went out and earned the living. We asked them about their lives and publicized the clinic.

The week continued in much the same fashion as the first two days, trudging to the club, eating, up THE HILL or to the clinic to work, eating again, trudging back to the seminary for showers, team meetings and Brazil nights, and then sleep. During this time we had a crowd of children that helped the construction team that

grew larger each day, and we began to understand Carlos and Cezan, the two musclemen who were the permanent construction workers for the center. We heard lectures on the debt crisis and watched our first real storm come from twenty miles away to drench us in twenty minutes. It was an exciting, yet exhausting week and now it was time for some R & R and travel.

#### Chapter 8: "Party At Pingo's And Road Trip!"

After a hard week of work, we were treated by the engineer, Luis, to a trip downtown to an establishment called the Pingo Laser, where we could dance and talk and forget all about our sore muscles. We made such a spectacle of ourselves that we were written up in the local paper.

Bright and early the next morning, we were herded onto our bus, and we headed for Ouro Preto and Belo Horizonte for two days of capitalist frenzy.

When we arrived in Ouro Preto later that day, we were taken first to a shop that sold precious stones and the like and then shown the soapstone market (the "Sam's of Soapstone") by Jim Goodwin. Jim was able to talk us into buying and the dealers into selling more soapstone than we knew what to do with.

After our buying frenzy we headed off to "Death Camp," a former asylum turned Methodist retreat. There we had run-ins with the supernatural, insects of all sorts and rodents, exploding showers that doubled as greenhouses, and other such memorable

experiences. We celebrated Brant's birthday and had an opportunity to call home.

The next morning we boarded the bus again for Belo Horizonte, stopping along the way at a Methodist community center to pick up the bundles of locally made woven bags that we would transport back to the States and to buy some for ourselves.

We arrived at the market in Belo Horizonte and split into groups based on what we wanted to buy. Jim assured us that Belo was the place to buy leather goods, so we did. On the return trip, we got a chance to eat at a Rodizio (kind of a glorified truck stop) where they serve your meal Henry V style (meat stuck on swords), and to stop at the Brazilian version of Stuckey's where we (surprise) bought more stuff. This stop's popular item - blankets.

## Chapter 9: "Week 2: America At War"

We returned to work on Monday, the construction team pumped up and ready to accomplish our goal of putting up a wall, and the medical team to see as many people as possible. And we did - on Monday.

On Tuesday the rain began. We didn't work, but sat around and played cards all morning. In the afternoon we had a chance to go into town, and several of us took this opportunity to sample the local McDonald's. It was surprisingly like home. When we returned, we were informed that we had a TV and VCR donated for

the rest of our stay in order for us to keep up with the news from home about the war and maybe watch some movies for entertainment.

The rain continued on Wednesday, a fitting beginning for what was to come later. We went to work in the rain because we couldn't stand sitting around and were interviewed by the local television station about whether we agreed with Bush's policies. This interview, in which we said that we hoped for peace, was a precursor to the midnight message we received that war had begun. We held up fairly well, considering. We decided that we were safer sticking to our schedule than trying to get out quickly, so our Saturday trip to Rio was still on.

The next day we woke up to rain, and it was decided that we wouldn't even leave the dorm. We had the rare chance to sleep in, and breakfast and lunch were delivered to us. This boon did have the negative effect of giving us cabin fever, however. We braved the weather to go to dinner and were treated to pizza made by the Methodist missionary, Rosetta. We also had the opportunity to attend Catholic community mass.

It was now Friday, and we were still unable to work because of rain. The cabin fever was getting to a danger point and there was an unusually high amount of depression because it seemed that we wouldn't get anything done. We were treated that night to dinner in the dorm and a visit by the Bishop of Minas Gerais, and then we were shuffled off to bed for an early (4:15 a.m.) call for the bus that would take us to world-famous Rio.

Chapter 10:     " 'To Your Right Is Sugarloaf' "

We loaded up the bus on Saturday for Rio, headed for what we thought was to be a glorious day of shopping, sightseeing, and time at the beach. We were partially right. The day was glorious (for a refreshing change), and we did go shopping, sightseeing, and spent time at the beach. But we were promised lots of leather shopping - we got fifteen minutes in a very out of the way market; we were promised Christ the Redeemer - we got halfway up and had to turn around; and we didn't expect Copacabana (too dangerous), but we were promised Ipanema and we got Bakia (which did have a hang-gliding competition going on, though). In a nutshell, Jim had our day planned, but like everything else on this trip it was S.T.I.C. - subject to immediate change. Despite minor disappointments it was an enjoyable day - we saw Sugarloaf, ate at McDonald's, and had plenty of water and cheese sandwiches to keep us satisfied.

On Sunday we put on our "dress clothes" (mostly just modified work clothes) and headed for St. Matthew's Methodist Church downtown, where we were divided into groups and matched up with a family who entertained us for the afternoon. Many of us ended up at the Museum/Botanical Gardens, but some took naps, flew around the city, or just watched McGyver. After our time was up, we met back at the church for dinner and to attend a service, complete with a "house combo" that made the church seem more like a dance hall than religious meeting. For some, this was the highlight of the trip, for we were able to get to know middle class people just

like us on a personal level. Looming like a dark cloud over the day was the fact that tomorrow was our last day in Juiz de Fora, and that we would probably never see these new friends again.

#### Chapter 11: "The Last Day"

We woke up Monday to sunshine - both a blessing and a curse. We were glad that our last day in Juiz de Fora was one in which we could work continuously without the threat of rain. We revised our schedule so that we would only work a half day, but that we would work until 1:00 p.m. instead of our regular 11:00 a.m. After the disappointments of the last week, everyone was ready to do as much as we could to accomplish our goals, but tensions were high because we had little time and the heat was worse than it had been at any time during the last two weeks. We worked as hard as we could and in the end we had dug and cemented one and three-fourths foundations for the buildings at the rehabilitation center.

After work, we had lunch and went back to the dorm to pack and get cleaned up for dinner. The pastor of St. Matthew's came to the dorm with everyone who had hosted us during our stay and gave us communion, translated by Jim Goodwin. As each team member received communion, they left a gift for the community at the altar donated personally and/or by the team as a whole. We were also treated to music by the pastor and his family. We had a chance to say thank you to everyone who had given their time and love to us, and we received a gift of a team picture with a site map from them.

After the service, everyone headed downstairs for dinner and socialization. The conversation, games, and music lasted deep into the night, but since we had to be up very early to catch our plane to Manaus, the time for goodbyes came earlier than we all really wanted. We forced ourselves to say them, though, knowing we would never forget and preparing ourselves for the next adventure - the Amazon.

## Chapter 12: "Charles In Charge"

We hopped the bus to Rio for the last time and caught a plane to Manaus. When we arrived in Manaus, we were met by none other than Jeri Vandiver, another (better) bus, and a former legionnaire named Charles, who was to be our tour guide.

The bus took us to the Hotel Tropical where we could store our luggage, use the phone, and rest before boarding the boat that would be our home for the next three days. The hotel was a paradise, with multiple pools, a zoo, and any other luxury nameable. We had our last glorious night in Brazil at the Tropical to look forward to, but now we had a boat named paradise to board.

We trudged down the path to the dock where the "Green Paradise" stood waiting for us. We boarded, not knowing what our three days would hold. We knew that there were walks in the jungle, alligator hunts, Indian village visits, and scenic canoe rides in store, but we didn't expect what we got - misery and ecstasy inextricably intertwined.

We explored the boat, deciding that the second floor deck, uncovered half, and the roof of the covered half were the places of choice to relax with a cerveja and enjoy the stars and natural beauty. The boat was equipped with two essentials - a stereo and a refreshment stand. We made the most of both of these perks, but we enjoyed the swim in the lagoon even more.

The next day held in store an instructional walk through the Amazon jungle, during which we were introduced to the many helpful plants of the jungle. We were also taken on a scenic canoe trip into the jungle, where we were introduced to, up close and personal, a caiman, monkey, python, and, most importantly, a sloth (possibly the zoological highlight of the trip). We continued to party into the night and then collapsed into our hammocks for sleep.

Some of us were awakened during the night by the sounds of sick teammates checking out the view from over the rail. Other teammates helped those sick friends by holding flashlights and hands. The most interesting example of Green Paradise Syndrome (emphasis on green) was Amy Hunter's brush with death when she nearly fell overboard into the jaws of waiting piranha. Fortunately, she was caught before impact.

The next day held piranha fishing, alligator hunting, and a boat ride in the rain for some of us - some who weren't affected with Green Paradise Syndrome. We only had one night and half a day left, and most of us were overjoyed when we left the Green Paradise and checked into the Tropical.



At the Tropical we enjoyed all the benefits of a four-star hotel - something very strange after all the poverty we had lived around for the past two weeks. We spent the night, knowing that we would leave for home in a matter of hours.

The next day, we had the option of shopping in Manaus, and then we took a tour of the city, where we saw the Manaus Opera House and the Brazilian Army's Zoo, where they train for jungle warfare and for recognizing animal noises. We returned to the hotel to take our final showers, load our luggage, and return home.

Most of us must admit that although we didn't want the experience to end, we were ready to come home to our loved ones.

This record is dedicated to the  
members of the 1991 Service-Learning Team  
to Brazil and especially the people of  
Juiz de Fora, Brazil.

The author wishes to dedicate  
this record to Meg, who couldn't  
have the experience.

