

THREE VIEWS OF BRASILIA

Mrs. Iris Lonergan
Brasilia

Brazil will be your finest post", said a friend from the Department. I thought she had it right. I too remembered reading about exotic flora and fauna, soft nights filled with "beautiful, tropical, golden dreams". After four - let's say interesting - postings to Sénégal, Ethiopia, Madagascar and Indonesia, I was ready for the emerald beauty. Still, leaving was awkward for I am completing a thesis at Carleton University and had to re-enrol precisely when husband Terrence and son Oliver were due at Embassy and school.

It was mid-October before I set foot in Brazil. The city looked barren. Countless grass fires choked the air with smoke, it was all parched and crevassed ground, shrunken shrubs, and red earth as far as the eye can see. Furthermore, after a peck on the cheek and a short introduction to the local stores, Terrence abandoned me for Portuguese immersion in Rio. Alone, I had to brave the real Brasilia jungle: the supermarkets; Jumbo and Carrefour. Sixty cash registers, enormous lines, hordes of people - aghast, frantic, feverish. Push the carts, buy, buy, buy, beat inflation. Fill the carts - ten tins of oil, twelve tubes of toothpaste, thirty kilos of flour. Push and shove, squirm and squeeze and return home with your hoard. Yet again, no eggs today.

The months passed by quickly. I twice had to return to Ottawa to attend seminars. My trips had an interesting consequence, however. I had to experience two more arrivals. The second took place just before Christmas. The rains were falling. Hope renewed was sprouting through the cracks in the soil and in the hearts of men. We had a wonderful holiday. The most traditional events - Christmas Eve Service, the turkey dinner and the Yuletide evening - acquired a special significance. New Years Eve was spent peacefully under the Southern Cross while the children swam in the pool, giving Brasilia a new and softer tone of gentle merriment and hospitality.

On the third arrival, a month ago, I was looking forward to Brasilia. The biting cold of Ottawa repelled me, the resplendent sun beckoned me. Late rains are the softest and they dispense a parting caress onto the earth. It is not a riot of green, but it covers the hills, adorns the trees of blue, purple or red flowers, and seemingly paints every bird in luxuriant livery.

Two weeks ago, Terrence and I went to the library at the University of Brasilia. Young girls were offering yellow flowers and they smiled as they saw us and overheard our chatting. We were speaking English but it made no difference. I am a foreigner, I thought, but no longer a stranger.

How will I paint Brazil six months from now? I do not know. No Pollyanna image to be sure, I offer only honest reflections of what I see and feel.

