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Institute of Current World Affairs
The Crane-Rogers Foundation
Four West Wheelock Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755 U.S.A.

SLS-2 THE AMERICAS

Susan Sterner is a Fellow of the Institute writing and photographing the lives and status of Brazilian women.

“Kitchen Conversations” — Part I —

SÃO JOSÉ DOS CAMPOS, São Paulo, Brazil

March 1, 1999

Mr. Peter B. Martin
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, NH 03755

Dear Peter,

I've met two extraordinary women here in São José dos Campos: Angelica and Ana. They are sisters-in-law and have been friends for over 20 years. In the last two months they've opened their lives to me in an incredible way; offering me true friendship and tolerating all of my prying, clumsy questions about the nature of life as a Brazilian woman.

Angelica is a statuesque 39-year-old with an illuminating smile and quick sense of humor. She's married to Ana's brother, Carlos, and has four children spanning 19 years. She is bashful and loud, opinionated and tolerant. Her personality can easily sport either an apron or a catsuit. She's dynamic and complex and finds her answers through the Virgin Mary.

Ana is a small, sinewy woman with deep, coffee-colored skin and a voice raspy from years of smoking. She exudes a rough strength and has an easy manner with everyone — when she's sober. Her energy level is that of a 20-year-old, but there are lines and scars on her face that suggest she's seen too much in her 42 years. She has a story for every occasion — usually one she's lived herself. Ana sees a little good in everyone — even politicians, although she doesn't think the good ones have ever run Brazil. She's fiercely proud to be Brazilian but has a feeling life would be better somewhere else. She is the fourth of six children and, with the help of her father, she's raised one daughter, Claudia, 25.

Through Angelica and Ana I've gleaned some of my first impressions of life for Brazilian women. At times their lives seem dauntingly precarious. They are humble, earnest members of the working poor who exhaust themselves every day to keep their families going. I come away from my time in São José better informed about Brazilian culture and convinced that I'll never fully understand this fascinating land.

I met Angelica through Yelva (EE-yel-va), my Portuguese teacher. Angelica works as Yelva's maid, cook and sometime-secretary. During my morning classes in Yelva's living room I would often hear Angelica sweeping the floor and singing an inspirational tune to herself or joking with Yelva's sons, Cezinho (say-ZEEN-yu), 21, and Dado (DAH-doo), 15.

When my questions to Yelva about local culture taxed her knowledge she



Angelica, right, embraces Ana during a break in their work at Yelva's house. They have been great friends and sisters-in-law for over 20 years and rely on each other heavily for support.

would often call in Angelica to offer her opinion. My husband, Tyrone, and I quickly came to love her sense of humor and frank assessment of issues.

Curious about the lives of *empregadas* (maids) who seem to be the pulse of so many middle-class households, I asked Yelva if I could spend time with Angelica while she worked in her house. Yelva was enthusiastic, and Angelica agreed.

On the designated day Tyrone helped me carry grammar books to Yelva's. He was just going to stop and say "hi" and I was going to stay for the day to hang out with Angelica. As we walked up the mimosa-shaded street lined with 1970's modern cement homes I noticed a thin black woman walking about 15 paces ahead of us. From behind she looked to be 5'3" and a tough 90 pounds. She carried herself with squared shoulders and energy in her step. Her dark, wiry hair was cropped close to her head. She wore a sleeveless shirt that revealed a jagged black scar running down the length of her left arm, contrasting with the deep brown of her skin. I wondered absently about her, but had my mind on the day ahead. I figured she worked for one of Yelva's neighbors

As we neared the house Tyrone and I were nearly in step with the woman. When we all stopped in front of Yelva's gate there was an awkward moment of surprise. We greeted each other and she rang the bell. Secretly, I worried that Angelica had called in sick, or gotten suddenly shy about talking with me. But then I heard her throaty laugh as she came up the stairs from the kitchen to see her friend. Angelica unlocked the gate and the two

embraced. Then she turned to me and said she would get Yelva. I said, "you don't need to disturb her. I'll just go wherever you're going. The two of them stared at me. I explained that I was there to learn about Angelica's life.

She burst out laughing and covered her mouth as she stepped back. "*Nossa Senhora!*" (Our Lady!, or Holy Mother!!) Yelva appeared and greeted us. She had neglected to tell Angelica that I had actually called to set up a specific day. She turned to Angelica and told her I would be spending time with her to get to know the life of a Brazilian maid. Angelica raised her eyebrows and looked at Ana. They smiled warily and walked down to the kitchen to change into work clothing.

Yelva's home is a split-level, four-bedroom, cement-construction house painted bright white and adorned with architectural accents that look like warped portholes. The house is filled with little flourishes typical of 1970's residential architecture such as circular bathrooms and large sliding metal windows and doors. From the entrance a narrow hallway leads from the living and dining room area and cuts through the middle of the house passing five bedrooms. At the end of the hallway is a circular stairwell lit by a porthole-window. The stairs bend down to the second level to a small kitchen, bathroom, breakfast area and den that open onto an enclosed granite patio. Behind the kitchen is a small maid's room for ironing and changing clothing.

Chagrined that I had been sprung on Angelica unannounced, I quietly took my notebook out of my bag and went looking for her. I found her upstairs in the liv-

ing room, pulling the limbs out of an artificial Christmas tree and packing away little snow scenes. (Yelva had acquired all the accoutrements of a White Christmas 30 years before, when she spent four winters at Cornell, New York State) I didn't know where to begin with Angelica so I asked basic questions and her story began to unfold for me.

Angelica was born in Santo Antonio da Platinha, Paraná. She lived there until she was 13. "My father died when I was nine. It was very sudden. He had no insurance" He was a mason and worked from job to job. The family had debts because they bought on credit. When he died of leukemia he left Angelica's mother with no money at all. "I was the eldest. I had to help my mother. My mother was not allowed to go to school. Her father did not believe that girls needed school. She worked very hard so I could stay in school after my father died."

As she tried to tame the fake limbs into a narrow storage box Angelica continued, "She would get up very early every morning and leave by six to clean houses. I woke up after she did and took a bath. Then I would make something for my sister, 6, and brother, 3, to eat for breakfast and have as a snack. I would hide everything that could hurt them and put the food in the center of the table. Then I would go to school until one o'clock. I would return home and make a lunch. When they got tired I put them to bed and took a nap until my mother came home. We would make dinner together, then wash clothes and do the cleaning I was too small to do by myself."

After a few years her aunt sent word her mother that she had found a job they could do together in a restaurant in São José dos Campos in the state of São Paulo. Angelica left school, and her mother packed up everything and took a bus north. Initially, Angelica found work in a factory gluing soles onto tennis shoes. After a while she was hired as a waitress at the same restaurant that employed her mother and aunt.

"By then we were doing better. I was working. My mother was working. We moved from my aunt's house and rented our own. Everything was getting better. Angela was old enough to take care of my brother and the house. They both went to school" With every hint of Christmas packed away Angelica turned out the lights and we headed to the kitchen.

As we walked down the stairs to the kitchen, Angelica looked back over her shoulder, "I think my brother, Lauro, had the best childhood of the three of us. He was the youngest and didn't have to take care of anyone. He was the only one who actually played. He had the most freedom. His childhood was the best of ours."

Ana and Angelica divided up the tasks for lunch. I kept trying to help, but the kitchen was so small and they were so busy that I just got underfoot. At one point An-

gelica pulled out a little stool and told me to sit there out of the way. I pulled out my notebook again and started asking questions about the day's menu. Raw food was piled up on counters: chicken, rice, potatoes, coconut, tomatoes, onions. It looked like a big meal was going to happen.

I turned to Ana, "Do you work with Angelica a lot?" Angelica replied that Ana was her sister-in-law and was there to get to know the house so she could work there for a month while Angelica took time off for a hysterectomy.

"But," said Angelica, glancing over at Ana, "Can I tell her?" Ana nodded, "Dona Yelva likes her very much, but is worried about her. Ana is an alcoholic. Sometimes she just disappears for weeks and we don't know where she is — sleeping under bridges. She worries us."

Ana stood silently drying the breakfast dishes, reaching on tiptoe to put them in the cabinet above me. "But I'm not drinking now," she said. Dona Yelva is very good to me. I need the work."

Soon the business of getting lunch together melted away their shyness. As they chopped onions and washed greens they joked and caught up on family news. Ana told the story of when they met over 20 years before. "I had seen her (Angelica) in the street. I knew she was my brother's girlfriend. Then she got pregnant and had Luciana (Angelica's first child). I thought she didn't like me [she made a drinking motion with her hand]. I went to see her when Luciana was four months old. I got there and she was giving her a bath. We liked each other a lot. We have been friends since that day."

This started Angelica and Ana laughing like school-girls as they remembered that day. They talked so quickly I couldn't catch everything they said and interrupted them for explanations of slang expressions. My bewilderment amused them and, I think, endeared me to them. They stopped seeing me as a threat and at one point Ana turned to me and laughed, "So ask your questions, Susana. What is it you want to know so badly that you're spending your day with the maids in the kitchen?"

I told them I wanted to know what their lives were like. What would my life be like if I were Brazilian? I wanted to know about what they dreamed, and over what they worried. How did it feel to clean a house everyday and then go home and clean and take care of their own families? Were their lives different from their mothers'? Are their daughters' lives better?

"Dreams?" said Angelica as she slammed a cleaver down onto the back of a raw chicken, sending a spray of blood and water onto the blue-flower-tiled walls. "I don't have any. I've never had any. I don't like to think about the future. I live in the present. That's enough." She

swabbed the wall with a rag. "Things are different. My mother never studied. She didn't know how to read or write. Her father didn't permit it. She had to work while her brothers went to school. My mother learned to read and write when she was 44. Oh, she was so proud. She read everything around her. Now she reads magazines. She's a very humble, simple person. She's beautiful."

Tossing the chicken parts into a pan and covering them with olive oil, Angelica continued: "Did my mother have dreams for me? I think so. She wanted me to be a doctor. She wanted Angela to be a teacher, and my brother an engineer. Not one of us made her dreams come true. She didn't want me to get married. She wanted me to have my own life."

Angelica met her husband Carlos in 1974 when she was 14 and he was a soldier with the Brazilian army based in Caçapava, a small town 30 minutes north of São José. They dated for four years before she became pregnant. "What could my mother say when I got pregnant? She had to accept it. I had Luciana in the hospital. I didn't even know how to breastfeed. The nurse brought her to me and said, 'Feed your baby'. I asked for a bottle. She said, 'No, you don't need a bottle. Breastfeed her.' Then she taught me how. I didn't know anything about it.

"Now I have four children: Luciana who is 20 has one baby and is pregnant again. Erika, 17, she has a son two years old. Breno, 10, and then Israel who is three. Erika got pregnant six months after I had Israel. When I was pregnant, I didn't know. I was waiting for my period to come so I could go have an operation to make myself sterile. I didn't want any more babies. I went to the doctor to schedule the surgery and he said, 'Woman you can't have this operation. You're pregnant now!' I was very surprised. How am I pregnant? He said, 'that's how it goes.'"

Angelica smiled as she talked about Israel. For her he was a gift from God to give her sanity and love. She looked over at Ana as she said this. "I pray a lot. Ana does not. She does not have the same faith I do." Ana shrugged and bent to pull a pan of simmering chicken from the oven. She covered the chicken with slices of onion and topped the whole thing with slivers of fatback. Ignoring Angelica's prodding, she basted the meat, slid it into the oven and told me about her mother.

Ana began cleaning houses alongside her mother at the age of eight. "Everything is different now for women. Women have much more liberty. Much more time for their education. Today women have to go to school. I had to work.

"Before, mothers beat their children to teach them life. Not today. I didn't beat my daughter. I was beaten hard by my mother. Once I tried on her bra. I was curious. She caught me and beat me until I couldn't cry. She never said why it was wrong...She just beat me.

She described her father as a grandchild of former slaves, gentle and well-read. Her mother never learned to read. "My mother had a very rigid childhood. She was one of 18 children, a daughter of ex-slaves. During slavery parents didn't have much tenderness for children. They were raised without love. Children were more to feed and more work. That's how my mother was raised. As soon as a child could walk she worked. She started working when she was three years old. Children had to do whatever they were strong enough to do. My grandmother was a cook in the streets. My mother carried potatoes and washed things for her."

Ana shifted to a counter and began grating fresh coconut for a custard. On the stove, pots of beans and rice simmered and potatoes cooled. Angelica snapped beans at the sink on the other side of the room. The tiles had begun to sweat as the steam rising from the food collected against the cool of the morning. Ana kept a steady rhythm with her hands and the coconut collected on the plate in drifts. "When I was a girl, I played all the time with my brothers and other children. We were all like puppies: playing, running, flying kites. We all slept together, a mountain of tired children. I was in a tree one day. There were a lot of other children around. I looked down and saw blood. I didn't feel anything but I started to scream. I thought I was hurt. I jumped down and pulled down my pants. Then I went crying to my mother.

"I had began to menstruate for the first time and everything changed. My mother told me I was not allowed to play with my brothers or with any other boys again. I had to sleep separately from it. I asked her why. She beat me. Her answer was always a beating. She was very rigid with me.

"It [menstruation] was never spoken of in front of my brothers or father. My mother taught me how to fold a cloth and pin it into my clothes. I had to wash it when none of the boys were home. I had to take baths all the time: morning, lunch, after school, before bed, all the time. She didn't talk to me about the body. Nothing was said about sex. I learned about my body in school. I had a teacher who let the girls ask her questions like that. Everything else I learned in the street.

"We were living in the downtown then. We had a lot of space. Then the city had more green land. We had a woodstove outside. That's how my mother liked to cook. It was slower. She said it gave better flavor than gas.

"I have a very strong connection to my mother. I have it in cooking, cleaning, gardening, discipline. I am the one who learned to cook from her. She loved the pace of the wood fire and nursing food along. I learned my seasonings from her. I cook like my mother. I am the only one."

Angelica took plates from the cupboard and set the table for lunch. I noticed she was setting four places and



Angelica jokes with Cezinho, left, and Dado, right as she zips around the table making sure everything is perfect for them for lunch.

asked her who was going to eat here. "Dona Yelva, the boys and you." I asked her to take my plate away, saying I wanted to eat with her and Ana wherever they were going to eat. Angelica looked at me sideways and half-smiled. She said o.k., but left the plate where it was.

A few minutes later Cezinho and Dado clamored down the stairs and greeted us. Cezinho opened the refrigerator and stood in front of it, taking stock. Dado joked with Angelica and lifted the lid of every pot on the stove. Angelica placed *maracujá* (passion fruit) juice on the table and the boys took their seats. One by one Angelica carried in *feijao e arroz*, (beans and rice), seasoned potatoes, the chicken — golden brown and covered with caramelized onions — a tomato salad, fresh greens, string beans, and *couve a mineira* (shredded kale sauteed in onion, garlic and oil).

Cezinho looked up at me and asked if I was going to eat. "No, I'll wait. Thanks." He shrugged and reached for the rice. I slipped into the kitchen where Angelica was already beginning to straighten up and Ana was putting the finishing touches on her coconut flan.

Ana started to wipe down the walls as they waited for the boys to finish lunch. Again she picked up the thread of our conversation. She told us about starting her first job without her mother at the age of 14. "I cleaned the house all morning and cooked a beautiful lunch. I made a polenta. When lunch hour came around, ...the Dona [head of the household] kicked me out of the

kitchen like a dog. She thought I was going to steal the same food I had just cooked. Then she made me a plate with very little food on it. She gave the other maid very little food, too. I thought it was wrong. I was there to work hard all day long. I had to eat well to work. I gave the plate back to her and said that as poor as I was, I could eat better in my own home." She took off her apron and quit.

Just then Yelva arrived. Angelica and Ana greeted her as "*Dona Senhora*" (Lady Mrs.), a name used on a current soap opera by maids to deride their holier-than-thou employers. Yelva laughed at the joke and beckoned me to sit with her for lunch. She was a little harder to turn down; it was her house. I sat, hoping the comraderie of the kitchen would spill to the table and Yelva would invite them to eat lunch with us. That didn't happen. Yelva closed the door behind us and switched to English.

"Now we're trying to live like you in the United States — without *empregadas*. But me, I'm so accustomed [to them] that I have built my life so that I don't know how to live without them. My mother had three: one in the house, a boy in the garden and another girl to help the first one. It's too expensive these days.

"It's very expensive to have a maid. I have to pay her at least a minimum of \$R120 [U.S.\$60] a month. Angelica costs me the following: \$R350 each month in salary. \$R25 in health insurance, \$R25 for retirement, \$R48 for the bus. It can make me very mad when she doesn't

want to do something. I am paying her to work. I am a good person. I help her all I can, but this is my house, she shouldn't be so stubborn." Yelva rattled off a few of her frustrations with Angelica, but ended up talking about how difficult she knows Angelica's life is, and said she's glad they get along so well. "I trust her and the boys really like her."

I asked why Angelica would have had such a funny reaction to my requesting to eat lunch with them. Yelva answered, "Oh they're probably embarrassed, or afraid they will make a mistake in front of you. They're just shy right now."

Lunch came to an end and I opened the door to the kitchen and carried in dirty plates. Yelva followed and gave Angelica a few suggestions for the afternoon before leaving to run more errands. Ana and Angelica pulled down two plates and walked into the dining area. I asked if I could sit with them while they ate and they laughed a little nervously. We kept talking. I praised them about the meal and asked if they could teach me how to make a really good *feijão e arroz* (beans and rice). To do that, they explained, I'd have to go to their house for a Sunday meal. I agreed. "And bring your husband this time!" Ana laughed showing the big hole in her smile that once held one of her front teeth.

Angelica poured a toothpick into her hand from a little shaker and asked, "Where is Tyrone?"

"He's out working somewhere. I think he's with his friend in the *Banhado*."

"How does he eat during the day?"

"What do you mean?"

Exasperated, Angelica harumphed, "No, Susana. Who makes him food if you're not there? How does he eat?"

I smiled, "Well he actually knows how to cook for himself. Sometimes he even cooks for me. If I'm not there he makes something to eat or goes out and buys it in a restaurant. He won't go hungry."

They absorbed this. Angelica persisted, "But aren't you worried about him?"

"No, I'm sure he's fine."

Then she posed her real question. "But, Susana, aren't you afraid of the Brazilian women? Your boyfriend is so handsome they'll try to catch him. Brazilian women love American men."

"He's my husband. I trust him completely."

"But you're not wearing a wedding band!" exclaimed

Angelica grabbing my left hand and looking at the plain silver band I wear.

"Yes, this is my wedding ring. Tyrone has the same one. We've been married for six years."

Angelica clicked her tongue, "That's not a wedding band. Wedding bands are gold in Brazil. That just means you have a nice boyfriend. Tyrone needs to buy you a ring. He can get two, a set for R\$30.00. You'll be safer."

"You think women will then leave him alone?" I joked.

Angelica was serious. "No, Brazilian women have no shame. You'll still have to watch," she cautioned.

Ana narrowed her eyes at me, "You know he loves you? He has confidence in you, too?"

"Yes"

Angelica sighed. "Susana, Life is not as good to a Brazilian woman. Men are very jealous here. Men and women don't trust each other. That's the way a Brazilian man is. They have no shame. Go around with other women. I know many married women who have AIDS because their husbands go out after other women and prostitutes. Infidelity is everywhere. It's accepted as part of marriage for the men. AIDS is growing because the Brazilian man never thinks it will touch him. Men don't think much. Women suffer a lot."

While Angelica had been speaking Ana got up and stepped onto the patio and lit a cigarette she pulled out from under her apron. She inhaled as she paced in a little circle and then leaned against the window bars separating us as she exhaled, "Men are in general macho. They're violent and believe they're superior to women. A woman has to work outside of her home to have a good life. She spends all day cleaning another house. Making their beds, cooking for them, arranging their lives, everything for them...Then she goes home and starts all over again working for her husband. Husbands do nothing. Women never rest. It's women who take control. Women take responsibility."

Ana switched to politics, saying that if a woman were president of Brazil the country would finally change for the better. She was little impressed with the current president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, "He has a very mean appearance." She spoke of the former mayor of São José dos Campos, Angela Guadagnin (in office 1992-1996), who was with the *Partido Trabalhador* (PT, or Worker's Party). "She was a very good person. She really felt the life of the people. Angela understood the people's suffering. I think women are more sensitive. Men are very hardened. Women

realize we need to live with human rights, with dignity. It is women who do the work of life, don't you think?

"When the huge rains came she actually went into the *favelas* [urban slums] to see the mudslides and floods for herself. She started an urbanization of the *favelas*. She really felt the lives of the people. You'll see that at my father's house."

I asked Angelica how she felt about politics. She shrugged. "I don't think about them [the politicians]. The economy is o.k. I try to work to pay for food and to keep our house. Politicians are all the same. They make no difference. They say they are making changes, but nothing changes." But she expressed worry about the economy (this was before the January 12th devaluation of the *real*). "Prices are creeping up, but salaries are staying the same. Drugs are on the streets here. Kids start at ten or eleven. Girls have sex for five to ten *reais* [U.S.\$4-8.] so they can get food, or more drugs."

"I never did that. I worked at the same restaurant as a waitress from age fourteen to twenty-four. I liked it. I liked meeting different people. I had to leave when the owner decided I was too old to get men to spend money."

"Now I am very frustrated that I am not home to raise my two sons. My husband had a very good-paying job when I had the first two. He made a salary big enough that I didn't have to work. I stayed home with my girls. But then the factory where he worked closed. He got his new job in the city maintenance. It's a good job with good health insurance, but the pay is too low and our family too big. I have to work. I can't care for my two sons. My daughter Erika does a good job, but she is not their mother. She and Breno don't respect each other. They are very close in age. They fight a lot. I should be at home, but I have to work."

Angelica sighed and went out to the patio. Sweeping up clippings from the garden, Ana called out, "Oh, Susana, does that place really exist in the United States where you can just get married in a day if you want to?"

I was confused by the question because the conversation had been heading in another direction. She waved her arms above her head, "The city with all the lights. Can you really get married in a day?"

"Las Vegas? Do you mean Las Vegas?"

Angelica nodded, "Yes, from the movies!"

"Yes, it exists. I think you can get divorced pretty fast there too." Their eyes popped. They couldn't imagine being able to get married and divorced at will. They explained that just a civil marriage in Brazil took six weeks and a divorce could take years, even if it was ami-

cable. The result was that a lot of ceremonies got skipped altogether.

"You just need the ring," said Angelica, wiggling the fingers of her left hand at me. "You can have mine."

They asked a few more questions about the movies and the United States, like why so many movies were about blowing things up. I had no answer. "Have you ever met Tom Cruise? How about Richard Gere?" Angelica nearly swooned just saying their names. Ana ventured, "Maidens make a lot of money in America don't they?" I answered, "no" to all three questions. They were disappointed, but smiling.

Ana and Angelica started hanging laundry, still laughing at the idea of getting married in a day. They then returned to the kitchen and cleaned it completely. Ana, full of energy and determined to impress Yelva, scrubbed the walls and ceiling. Angelica put everything away and pulled it all out again to make dinner for Cezinho and Dado. She prepared pasta for them and left it on the stove.

Everything in order, they changed out of their work clothes and packed up to leave. Angelica invited me to her house so I could see it and learn the way to get there for Sunday's lunch. Just as we were leaving, Yelva arrived and gave Ana a ride to the bus stop and dropped us off at the entrance to Angelica's neighborhood.

The pavement ended there. It was a community of a dozen duplexes painted canary yellow. Each one was surrounded by a narrow cement courtyard and enclosed by five-foot-high walls. We picked our way down the muddy alley to Angelica's house. Hers was the last in the complex before the land opened up to a big field of dirt, and dropped into a valley. It was a quiet.

Quiet until Israel and Lucas, who were peering out from the gate to Angelica's house like tiny prisoners, caught sight of her and started howling in excitement. Angelica laughed and teased them by going around the corner and said she lived somewhere else and they would have to live with me. The boys went silent. They stared at me for a moment and then burst into tears. Angelica reappeared and calmed them.

A metal-grill door was propped open to let air flow into the first room, a dark, cool space open to the rafters. Disintegrating black vinyl couches were jammed against two walls and a third was filled with a rickety entertainment center loaded with an old color television set and two enormous speakers wired to a boom box. On the very top rested drums and a tambourine. The only art on the walls were variations of the beatific face of the Virgin Mary.

The kitchen opened up from the first room and was covered in pale-yellow tiles with tiny sprays of white

flowers. Everything in the kitchen was neat and orderly. Through the windows looking into the back patio I saw laundry hanging. Angelica's second daughter, Erika, came out of her room and Angelica introduced us. We sat down. Lucas whimpered as he hovered behind his mother's chair, watching me. Angelica collapsed into a chair and was besieged by Israel, who climbed into her lap and stuck his head under her shirt to breastfeed.

In her loud voice Angelica said, "Susana, isn't it crazy? I am a white woman and have black children. But look at Erika. She has a little white boy. Everything here is mixed up. We Brazilians are all black and white together." She called Breno, her ten-year-old boy, from his cartoon program and sent him out to get hot bread from the bakery around the corner. He returned minutes later

and ripped open the bag in the center of the table. Little hands came out of nowhere and grabbed the steaming rolls. I looked under the table and saw Lucas and Israel pulling apart the bread and eating in quick, messy bites.

The household didn't quite seem to know what to do with me. I looked out the window and realized it was getting dark. An afternoon storm was moving into the valley. I was exhausted from a day of keeping up with Ana and Angelica in Portuguese, and I told Angelica I thought I should go. She insisted on walking me to the bus station to make sure I got on the right one.

Susan

