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Ana & Angelica — Part II —

SÃO JOSÉ DOS CAMPOS, São Paulo, Brazil

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Part II Introduction

Through her Portuguese-language teacher, Yelva, ICWA Fellow Susan Sterner met two sisters-in-law, Ana and Angelica, who work as housemaids in Yelva's middle-class house in São José dos Campos, a small industrial city outside São Paulo, Brazil. Angelica is



Ana (left) and Angelica

married to Ana's brother Carlos, a former soldier in the Brazilian Army, and has four children: Luciana, 20, Erika, 17, Breno, 10 and Israel, 3.

Ana, mother of a 25-year-old daughter, Claudia, is separated from a violent husband, and lives part of the time with a boyfriend, part of the time with her father.

In Part I of this series of reports on the lives, families and attitudes of Ana and Angelica, Susan spent a day with them as they carried out their duties in Yelva's house, then walked home to Angelica's house. There she met Angelica's sons, Breno and Israel. Also waiting for her was Lucas, 2, the son of 17-year-old Erika.

In Part II, Susan and her husband Tyrone attend a Sunday party at Angelica's house; Susan and Ana spend a Thursday with Claudia at the home of Ana's father; and Susan puts in another house-working day with Ana and Angelica in the home of her teacher, Yelva.

RICE, BEANS, AND SAMBA

The storm that set in while Angelica and I were walking to the bus stop continued for four days. On Sunday the storm broke and we awoke to sun. When Tyrone and I arrived at Angelica's neighborhood it seemed like a different place. There were children everywhere and music playing in all the houses.

Erika opened the gate and we stepped over a half a dozen puppies and their mother. Inside the family had doubled in size. Angelica's sister Angela and brother-in-law Zé (ZAY) were there with their three daughters. Angela was already chopping onions. The television blared music from the Xuxa Show and Angelica's sons Israel and Lucas, hop-danced to the theme music.

A tall, wiry man with deep black skin appeared out of a bedroom wearing



A very tipsy Ana dances samba as her brother Carlos, right, pounds out the rhythm on the tambourine and sings during our Sunday afternoon lunch at Angelica and Carlo's home.

old shorts, a red tank top and sunglasses. He slid the glasses to the top of his head and shook first my hand and then Tyrone's. This was Carlos, Angelica's husband. He welcomed us to his house and promised cold drinks soon.

Angelica asked me to go with her to the store to pick up some drinks and other things for the afternoon. As we headed out Carlos picked up Israel and joined us for the walk. A few minutes later we arrived at the neighborhood grocery. Angelica pulled from her pocket a pile of meal tickets Carlos had earned for lunches but not used. "Have you ever seen these?" she asked. I hadn't. "They make Carlos' salary worth more. He saves them on days when he doesn't want lunch and brings them to me so I can buy groceries with them." She stepped into the store and began loading my arms with soda bottles and bags of chips. She grabbed a few vegetables and a bag of rice and we headed to the counter.

Outside, Carlos hoisted Israel onto his shoulders and took one of the bags. Angelica and I carried the rest back down the hill. As we walked Angelica began talking to Carlos about all she had shared with me, "I told her how much a woman suffers with a man like you, eh Carlos? Never knowing where you are, always out in

the bars." Carlos nods. He had heard it before.

"Yes, there is suffering," he answered, and smiled absently.

By the time we returned the house was filled with relatives. Ana, Zezinho (zay-ZEEN-yoo), the man she is living with, and her daughter Claudia had arrived. So had Marcia, the youngest sister of Carlos and Ana. With the voices of 19 adults and children competing to be heard, the scene soon became raucous.

Ana, Angelica, Angela and Marcia gathered around the sink to debate how the *feijao* should be finished (the beans are soaked overnight and cooked slowly without seasoning during the morning). I stepped away from the pots, figuring there were already too many cooks. At the kitchen table Tyrone settled down with Zé to tackle the Sunday crossword puzzle and sip cold beer. Under the table the littlest ones played in their own world. Ana tuned in samba music on the radio and insisted all the women cram into the tiny living room and teach me to samba. It was so hot the effort lasted for only one song but put everyone in a festive mood.

To catch a little air, I peeked around back to find

Zeinho planting basil, mint, oregano and hot peppers for Angelica. He and Ana were trying to organize the garden. I had the feeling that he was actually shy around this boisterous family. I chatted with him for few minutes before returning to the kitchen.

There Carlos had peeled a dozen limes and was mashing their pulp into a pitcher filled with sugar and a little water. To that he added a quart of *pinga*, a white sugarcane rum, and two trays of ice to make a *caipirinha*. He poured glasses for everyone in the room. Ana came in from the back and asked for a glass. Acutely aware of her problems with alcohol, no one handed her one so she reached into the cupboard and grabbed a cup. I noticed Claudia looking at Marcia, and Angelica motioning to Carlos to stop Ana. Carlos walked away from the table and Ana poured out a full glass. "This is for Zeinho," she said and walked outside.

In a very short time a steaming pot of *feijao* and sau-



Angelica and Carlo's daughter, Erika, feeds her son Lucas (in her arms) and her brother Israel, left, during our Sunday party. Erika stays at home and cares for her two-year-old son and three-year-old brother and another brother, Breno, while her mother works outside the house as a maid and cook. Carlos works in city maintenance.

sage sat in the middle of the table. Around it were rice seasoned with garlic and bay leaf, *couve*, sliced tomatoes, hot sauce and boiled chicken. "In this house everyone eats anywhere they want, Susana," said Angelica. "No one sits at a table. Here's a plate." I piled rice and *feijao* on one side of my plate and filled the other side with *couve* smothered in Ana's homemade lemony hot sauce. Angelica wasn't happy. "Susana, take more. You have to eat more. Brazilians aren't shy about being hungry. Don't be shy."

Ana and Zeinho came in from the back yard. Zeinho's words were slurred and the formerly timid man was now loud

and incoherent. Zé commented that Zeinho got drunk too easily. He and Ana were a bad combination, he said, and watched as Ana poured herself another drink.

After everyone had many helpings the house chatter quieted down. The little ones were sent to take naps. The older kids went in search of friends in the neighborhood. Angelica and Angela talked at the kitchen table. I pointed to a collection of drums on top of the entertainment shelf and asked Carlos if he would show me how to play. He reached over my head and pulled down a three-foot-high red drum and a tambourine.

Carlos tried to show me the basic rhythm on the drum by leading with the tambourine, but each time I nearly had it the emotion of the song would carry him away and he would leave me behind. Frustrated, he handed the drum to Zé and they began to play samba in the doorway of the house. While Zé played, Carlos accompanied him with the tambourine and sang in his deep, scratchy voice. Ana, by now more than a little buzzed, began to samba and sing along.

I watched Carlos as he sang. His whole body marked the rhythm. With each breath he arched his back and tossed his head. The veins in his chest and neck bulged as he strained every bit out of each breath. While we danced Carlos made up lyrics celebrating the day. He sang a story of a woman and a man who came all the way from Los Angeles to Brazil to eat beans and rice on a Sunday afternoon.

This went on for a few hours. Everyone who could play took turns as either Carlos or Ana sang old songs. Zeinho continued to drink and kept trying to get Ana to kiss him. At one point he was threatening to topple over and had to wedge himself against a wall to

remain standing. Ana continued to drink too, becoming less coherent and weeping that she would never be as good as her brothers. The afternoon continued as if this were normal. Throughout all of this the babies slept. Just inside the door Angelica sat alone on one of the worn sofas, turned on a televised Sunday mass and said the rosary.

Suddenly, Zeinho provoked Ana and she punched him in the side of the head. She screamed and tried to go after him. Looking over from her program, Angelica put her hand on Ana's stomach to stop her at the living room door and yelled to Carlos to make Zeinho lay down until

he was sober. "These two will beat each other to death right in front of us. It happens whenever they drink," she said.

That seemed to be the signal to everyone that the wonderful afternoon had ended. Carlos slipped inside to nap. Zezinho disappeared altogether. Zé and Angela gathered their girls and loaded them into their car. Angela offered us a ride home and we crowded into the back seat. As we drove away, Angelica holding up Ana, who was delivering an emotional soliloquy on the beauty of having friends from the United States.

A SAFE HOUSE

Ana had her daughter, Claudia, when she was 16. Rather than move out of her father's home, Ana chose to stay there to give Claudia stability. She lived there for four years, after which Ana married Claudia's father and moved into a house with him. Claudia stayed with her grandfather, José do Nascimento, for most of her childhood. Ana would sometimes return to her father's home for a few weeks, or take Claudia to live with her for short periods.

In bits and pieces it became clear to me that Ana split her time between homes not just for stability for Claudia, but to escape a violent marriage. Her father frequently refused to let her take Claudia with her because of the violence and alcoholism, that dominated her life.

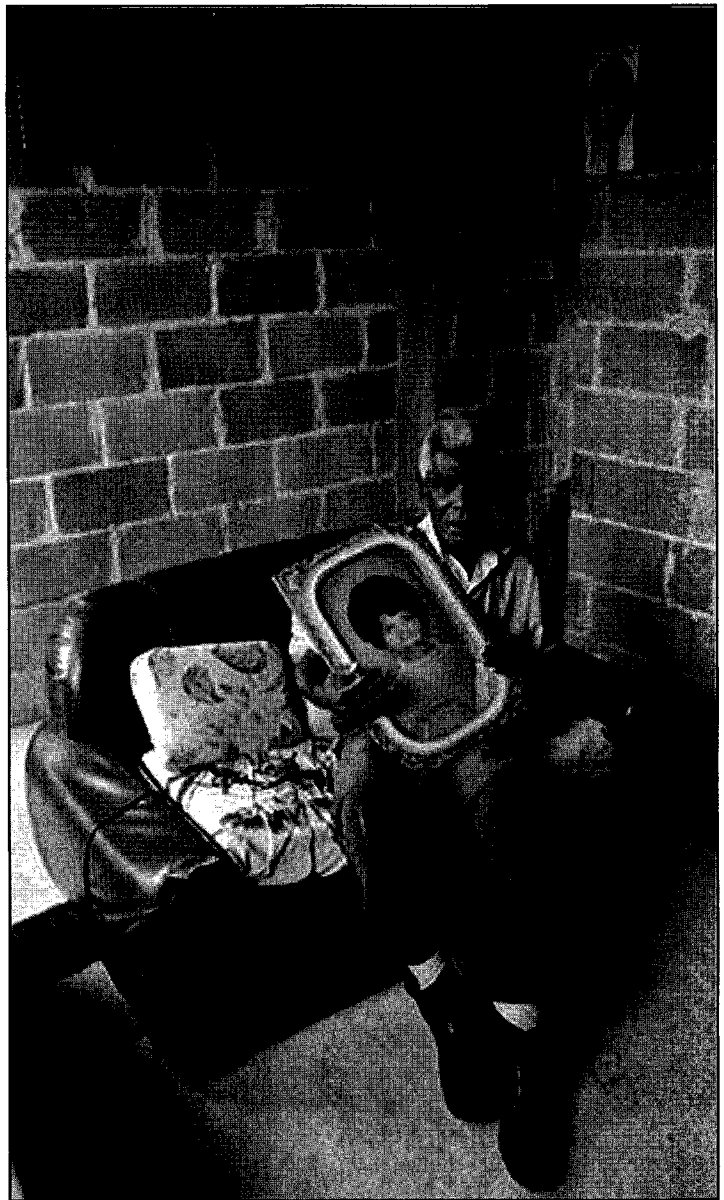
On a Thursday morning Tyrone and I packed up our cameras and notebooks and headed to the park to meet Ana. She had invited us to lunch and was very excited to have us meet her father and visit his home.

Before our customary greeting kisses (three for good friends — and everyone's a good friend) had even dried on our cheeks, Ana began talking to us in an earnest voice. She told us that in her father's neighborhood three people were arrested for drug dealing. She asked us not to take out our cameras when we were outside her father's house. She feared the families of the arrested people might think we were journalists covering the story and that she and her family were police informants.

We walked down a hill to the City Hall and cut through its parking lot into a little neighborhood called Santa Cruz II. At one time it was a desperate *favela*, but over the last decade City Hall had helped the residents get regular water and lights, replaced tin and wooden walls with cement and covered drainage areas. I'm sure that it was as much to make the *favela* safer for those who worked nearby it as it was to help

the residents. Whatever the motive, the result was a "regularized," well maintained neighborhood of tiny houses clustered between a new freeway, City Hall and the town cemetery.

Ana told us this story as we stepped out of the parking lot and into a maze of bright walls echoing the sounds of voices and clattering dishes. We turn down a little footpath passing open doorways and glimpses of simple kitchens, small televisions and — through huge gaps in one wall — a little girl getting her morning bath. We



José do Nascimento, Ana's father and Angelica's father-in-law, holds a portrait of his wife Maria, who died 25 years ago. José lives in a regularized favela in the downtown area of São José dos Campos. While Maria was very violent with her children, José is seen as the tender one of the family and his house is a constant shifting of daughters and granddaughters. At the moment Ana's sister Maria and daughter Claudia live with him.

ended up about ten yards from the freeway.

Ana's father's house was closed off from the noise of the street by a heavy metal gate. Ana opened the gate and we faced two front doors. To the left was the home of her newlywed sister Sylvia, 50, and her husband Sebastião. On the right lived Claudia, Ana's father José, 79, and her sister Marcia, 31. Ana called out to everyone as we stepped over a small rain guard into the living room.

With some effort, José stood to greet us. While one leg seemed spry enough, he favored the other and moved it around stiffly. A handsome man with sharp eyes and a ready smile, he was spiffed-up in a button-down shirt and worn flannel slacks. Ana introduced us and left us to talk in the living room while she changed into cooking clothes.

Two small love seats formed the shape of the room. On the television a game-show host rattled on. A few souvenirs from regional religious shrines were crowded above the television. I looked around the cinderblock-walled room. A few small things hung on random nails pounded into the mortar. High on one wall was a colored portrait-photograph of a beautiful woman I guessed to be Ana's mother. She looked so serene and open I couldn't envision her even raising her voice, much less beating her children. I listened to José talk and thought of Ana's sentimental words about him as the defender of

the family, and her source of tenderness.

Ana popped out of the kitchen for a moment and I took the opportunity to grab my bag and slip back to join her and Claudia in the kitchen. I wanted to keep hearing her stories and watch her work her culinary magic. I was curious about her relationship with Claudia and asked them about the years just after Claudia was born.

"My mother died in April 1973," Ana began. "Claudia was born in May. I didn't know anything. I didn't know how to fold a diaper. I lived with my father. He taught me how to take care of a baby. Claudia was born in a hospital. I was born at home. My mother had a midwife. Only the baby [Ana's youngest sister], Marcia, was born in a hospital. We're all two years apart except for her. She's eleven years younger. Marcia was on the breast until she was six years old. Claudia was two months early. She was born very small and very weak. She weighed only two kilos. I couldn't breast-feed her.

"When I had Claudia, I still wanted to be single. I wasn't ready to get married and leave my father's house. My mother had just died. I didn't want to leave him. I think we were all good for each other then."

As Ana scrubbed a pan Claudia said, "My mother is very rigid. She likes things clean. I'm the same. We're alike in many ways. We were always very close when I



Ana's daughter Claudia sweeps out the kitchen and patio of the three-room cinderblock house she shares with her grandfather and aunt. Claudia spent most of her childhood with her grandfather while her mother negotiated alcoholism and a violent marriage.

was growing up, even after she separated from my father.”

She whispered to me, “But then she hooked up with Zezinho. I don’t like him very much. He’s changed her.”

I asked about the way she grew up, being shuffled back and forth from her mother’s to her grandfather’s house and how the violence of her mother’s drinking affected her: “I’m close to my father. I love him but he can be violent. That’s one of the reasons I grew up here so much of the time. My grandfather didn’t believe they were raising me right. Both of my parents drank a lot.

“My father beat me whenever he was sober. It was hard to know where to go and when. It was horrible. My parents were very violent with each other, too. I saw many terrible things between them. My grandfather never liked my father because of how he treated my mother and me.

“I still visit my father. He lives nearby. But I want to live with my mother again. My mother has always been very good for me. She’s rigid but can listen, too. She loves to go out. She’s always on the move. But I can’t tolerate Zezinho. I hate them together.”

Ana showed no real reaction while Claudia spoke about Zezinho and I asked if he would be joining us for lunch. Ana shrugged, “I haven’t seen Zezinho since Sunday. He’s been gone for four days. He’s drunk in the streets.” Her tone was matter-of-fact.

“Aren’t you worried about him?”

“No, I’m not worried about him. I am not dependent on him like he is on me. He’ll come back.” And with that she announced that lunch was ready.

After lunch I helped Ana with the dishes and asked her about her dreams:

“When I was a little girl I dreamed of being a teacher. Since I was sixteen I’ve wanted a house and a piece of land. Still today I want that. I just want to live there and take care of the land. I want to be a *fazendeira* (rancher). I love to mess with plants. I love to plant something, a baby plant or seed, and see it grow. It changes every day. I learned to love this from my mother. She was a very practical woman — connected to the earth. She worked in our garden and I would work with her. She taught me plants. Then she would cook what she had grown. I had respect for what she taught me.”

Claudia chimes in, “I guess my dream is to have my own house; one with four rooms, not too big. I want to marry, too. I think that’s the dream of every woman. The difficulty is finding a man to tolerate. Maybe I would like to have three or four children. But first, a man.

Ana wandered out of the kitchen and I asked Claudia

about children. At 25, she was the oldest woman I had gotten to know in São José who was childless. “I’ve lost two babies: one at five months, the other at two months. The man I got pregnant with [the first time] was killed in October. I think it had to do with drugs. We lived together for seven years. We moved in together when I was 16. I left him because he had another woman. Two years have passed since we separated.

“So I did have a child, only it died. I didn’t know I was pregnant until three months after I got pregnant. I keep bleeding even when I’m pregnant. That’s why I didn’t know. I lost him at five months.

“It happened one night. I was trying to sleep. It was hot. I kept getting up to use the bathroom. I felt pressure in my stomach, but not pain. Then I got up one more time and I was all water and blood. The baby, Douglas, was already dead. All of the liquid in my womb had escaped and he died inside of me. I cried for two months. My mother cried longer. To this day she mourns for my baby.

“I got pregnant again. It was a different boyfriend. We weren’t even living together. I didn’t love him, but I was happy to have another baby. The same thing happened... I have a low uterus. I shouldn’t exercise or work hard when I’m pregnant. But that’s hard, since I can’t just stop taking care of my grandfather because I think I’m pregnant.

With the kitchen tidied up we relaxed in the living room. Conversation was hard because Claudia had turned up the volume on the television to watch a soap opera. But José had pulled out a box of old photographs to show me images of his wife and what the city looked like in the 1950’s and 60’s. Just as we were finishing a news program interrupted to announce that trading on the São Paulo stock exchange had been halted due to a fall in the *real*. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso had agreed to devalue the currency and stock markets were going nuts.

José wiped his brow with his napkin. “Money commands” he said. “If people don’t have money, they have no options, they steal. That’s the power of money.”

SCARS OF VIOLENCE

On another day that I spent working with Angelica and Ana in my friend Yelva’s house, the topic of social services for women arose as we were cleaning vegetables. Ana mentioned that health care for those without insurance is getting harder and harder to find. She alluded to the scar running down her left arm and said that if it had happened today instead of just five years ago she wouldn’t be able to use her arm. I asked her to tell me the story but she shook her head and said, “After lunch; it’s a very long story”

Later with dishes scattered around the table, Ana



Ana's father, José do Nascimento, cradles one of his granddaughters, Daniela.

leaned back to tell me her story. "Everything used to be better. There was little difference in the care for those who had and those who did not have health insurance. A person could walk into any public hospital and get help. Now it's not that way.

"I married when I was twenty-one years old. My daughter was four. I married her father, Adilson. We were together [married and not] for seventeen years before I separated from him. It's been eight years since I left. I'm still married to him. Here it costs too much money and takes too much time to get divorced. We just left each other.

"Adilson never liked to work. We always argued about that. He was also very jealous. We fought a lot. He was better when he didn't drink, but he drank a lot and when he drank he used drugs, too. About five years after we married the violence started getting really bad.

"The first time he wounded me we were at the beach. We had both been drinking. He had a big knife. The kind you open a coconut with [a short machete]. He started beating me with the flat side. He was jealous of I don't know what. Then he cut up my legs with the knife. I thought that was the worst it could ever be.

"Look here." She pointed to a crescent-shaped scar rimming her right eye. "He beat me in the face until I couldn't stand. Then I fell on the floor and cut open my eye. And this tooth," she said, pointing to a huge hole where one

of her front teeth used to be, "He beat me here, too.

"No, I never want to marry again. It's not worth it. I just live with Zezinho and his mother now. We've been together four years, maybe five."

Eight years before Ana decided to separate from Adilson she told him to leave. "He went to his mother's house, I found a place to live by myself." She moved into a one-room house in a downtown *favela*. There was a small stove there on one side of the room. She used an old armoire as a privacy barrier and put her bed on the other side of it. By day she found odd jobs. At night she worked as a restaurant cook. The owners gave the workers the leftover food.

Ana remembers it as August 5th. "It was cold. I took home some chicken pieces to make soup. It was so cold. I put everything in the pot and lit the fire. The soup started to boil. I had friends there: two guys I know, my daughter and my sister Marcia. My husband arrived. He started arguing with me and the others. He was drunk. We tried to ignore him and see if he would calm down. He went behind the armoire."

She says she knew he had a knife. "We tried to just be calm. I was sitting near the stove with my back to the bed area. My husband, full of drugs and alcohol, came around the corner and just grabbed the pot of boiling soup and poured it over me. It burned my left shoulder

and my arm. I was wearing a short-sleeved shirt. It protected me a little." Ana turned and showed me her neck. A long black scar ran from the base of her neck down along her left arm.

"I screamed. Everyone else ran after him. That night I went to the *Pronto Socorro* [emergency clinic]. Someone called an ambulance for me and took me to the hospital. The burn was so bad that I had two surgeries to calm the nerve in my neck. I was sent to a burn center. I had therapy for six months. It was all free. I paid nothing. They helped me. That was five years ago.

"Now if it happened today, a woman would have very little help." Ana explained that to get the same help now a woman would need to get a document from the municipal government or state government saying that she needed special help. "The hospitals don't take you if you don't have insurance. The poor don't have insurance. So the poor lose again. Our flag says '*Ordem e Progresso*' [Order and Progress], but there's no order here, and only the rich see progress.

"I was burned on a Friday night. On Monday morn-

ing I went to the *Delegacia das Mulheres* [Women's division of the police] to report my husband. The doctors had filled out reports about how badly I was burned. They [the police] could see it for themselves! A charge was filed of attempted murder but he was never prosecuted. The police did almost nothing. The policewoman I spoke to said, 'It's common. What can we do, you'll just go back to him.' My report was worthless.

"I've never heard of the police helping anyone. I have gotten help from SOS Mulher. They're completely different from the Delegacia. They were a marvel. I went there to figure out what to do about my marriage. They helped me. I talked with them. I feel I can go there for anything. They give protection to abused women. They teach women their rights. They're very cool.

"We say about the police that they see us only as '*pobre, preto e puta*' [poor, black, and whores]. They don't listen to the poor. But the politicians are the worst — and they're all white!"

Susan

