

# ICWA LETTERS

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## TLT-2 THE AMERICAS

*Tyrone Turner is a Fellow of the Institute writing about and photographing Brazilian youth and their lives in rural and urban settings.*

## Market Hustlers

São José Dos Campos, SÃO PAULO, Brazil

March 5, 1999

By Tyrone Turner

### "TAPA-DEIXE"

The first swat came out of nowhere, smacking the R\$8 (U.S.\$4) out of 11-year-old Juninho's<sup>1</sup> hands. He grabbed at the bills floating down as the crowd of kids swarmed around him plucking away at his day's income. Juninho screamed for them to leave him alone, but his cries only made things worse, like stirring up a wasp nest. Hands reached in, hitting him, trying again to dislodge the money. Insults rained. I thought it would escalate from skirmish to fight, but suddenly it ended. The mob of young faces dispersed, melting into the *feira* (outdoor market), looking for more work and tips.

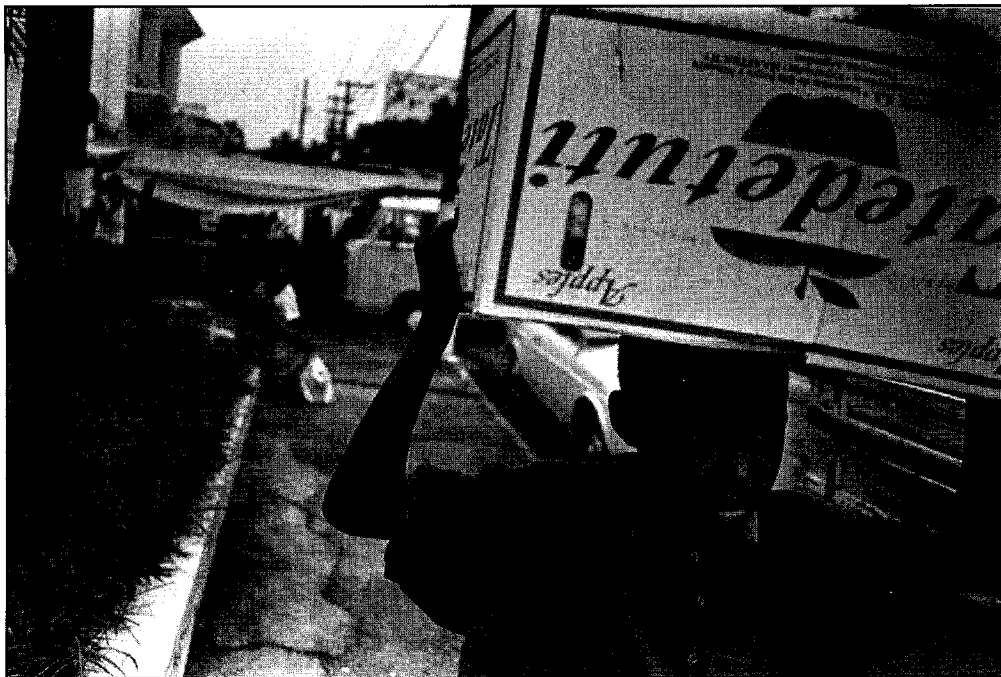
I tried to understand what I had witnessed; how this group of children could turn on one of their own so aggressively, and so quickly. At ages ranging from eight to 15, they earned R\$1 (U.S.50¢) in tips for carrying customers' sacks in the market. The kids all knew each other, lived in the same "*bairro popular*" (poor neighborhood), and most danced in the same street-dance group. In that instant, the mood changed, and I saw what people feared about youth, not just here, but in the U.S. also — the unpredictable potential for violence.

This day at the *feira* I was accompanying Margareth Passos dos Santos and Rogerio Marcos de Olivera, educators with *Projeto Aruaí* (Project Aruaí), a group working with street kids in São José dos Campos. Margareth explained the game to me. It is called "*tapa-deixe*" ("slap and leave"), a crude form of a bet. One kid will try to surprise another and swat away whatever the other has in his hand — money, jewelry, etc. If the latter holds on, he gets to keep the goods. If he lets go, it all goes to the swatters. She said that they were mad at Juninho because he lost and didn't give up the money. According to their street code, as she explained, the loser can exact revenge later. It sounded more like survival than a bet to me, since the person with the goods has nothing to gain and everything to lose.<sup>2</sup>

Before the kids got out of sight, Margareth pulled aside a couple of the boys who had instigated the incident. Sitting on a curb, she asked how they could treat a friend that way. And how could they could be a team in the

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Ju-NEEN-you and is a form of the name, Junior. His full name is Joel "Junior" Gomez da Silva.

<sup>2</sup> Susan and I had actually seen this once before, although to us it looked then like simple robbery. As a smaller kid counted change he had just received from guarding a car, a larger youth ran from behind and batted his hands forcefully, scattering the change over the sidewalk. Susan actually tried to yell to warn the smaller boy, but it was no use. The larger one ended up with the money. Later, we were surprised to see the same boys sitting with each other like friends.



Joel "Junior" Gomez da Silva, 11, carries a box of groceries from a feria, or outdoor market, where he works for tips. "Juninho," a nickname for Junior, says that he can make up to R\$60.00 a month doing this type of work a couple of times a week, and that half of his earnings go to his family.



Juninho screams at the other market kids to leave his money alone after one tried to knock the day's earnings out of his hands in a game called tapa-deixe, or slap and leave.

street-dance group, and pick on each other outside? Their eyes rolled, clowning with each other, and making motions to Juninho that they would make him pay when no adults were around. After failing to get through to them, Margareth touched an entrepreneurial nerve. She angrily warned that they would lose customers and the police would kick them out of the *feira* by causing loud disturbances. This impressed them and the group walked away quietly and slowly.

## MARKET HUSTLERS

I came to Brazil to look at the lives of adolescents. Much of my photojournalism work in United States fo-

cused on teen gangs and youth violence. In reading about Brazil, I was amazed at the sheer numbers of young people (half the population under 20, according to various sources) and the extent of the problems children and teens face (violence, homelessness, child labor, malnutrition, illiteracy). I wanted to tell the stories of their lives, of the Brazil they are inheriting, and of the people working on solutions to the difficulties they face.

Honestly, though, when I thought about getting into the issue of street kids and child labor, my mind leapfrogged over São José dos Campos. It is a small, relatively well-off industrial city about an hour's drive northwest of São Paulo. The city has its share of poverty, but it is not teeming with homeless youth.

When I thought about these issues, I wanted to go to the Northeast, where we had planned to travel after São José dos Campos (and where we are now). The region is mythic for the struggles of its people to survive poverty and harsh, dry, desert conditions not often associated with tropical Brazil. In spite of my own preconceived notions, however, daily life in São José offered an introduction to the lives of working youth only 40 yards from our apartment.

Nearby, two vegetable- and fruit-market *feiras* were held, one on Tuesday and the other on Friday mornings. My wife Susan and I would get up early to beat the crowds and the heat, and wander. In addition to fruit and vegetables vendors hawked everything from kitchen appliances and clothing to meats and local cheeses (*Mineiro* cheese, from the state of Minas Gerais, was one of our favorites).

Susan befriended Anita, a fruit seller who would

always tells which fruit was best for that week. We drooled over the beautiful mangos and papayas at her stand, so rich you could taste them with your eyes. Wrapping up our purchases, she'd always toss in something as lagniappe — limes, plums or something that we hadn't tried yet, like *maracujá*, or passion fruit. Since I was the designated "sherpa" of the family, the bags in my hands would grow heavier as the morning passed, the thin plastic making deep red ridges in the palms of my hands.

Soon I realized that other customers did not carry their own bags, that usually a small child would tote the goods as they moved from stall to stall. The kids were relatively easy to spot in worn clothing and beaten flip-flops. At the end, the kids would tote the sometimes-considerable load to the customer's car, and finally get their payment. Without fail they were always hustling at the market, no matter how early we got there. I imagined them taking the bus in the dark, early hours to get to the market for daybreak, for the start of the customers.

I remembered that some of the kids had approached us before. I had not understood their mumbled phrases, and misinterpreted them as begging. Immediately they proceeded to the next customer who looked in need and good for a tip.

On the one hand, I wondered how some of these adults could let small kids carry so much. On the other, most of the customers seemed to treat the children well, sometimes buying a breakfast *pastel* (deep-fried pastry filled with cheese, meat, or heart of palm) for the child at a snack stand. One of our friends who hired Juninho regu-

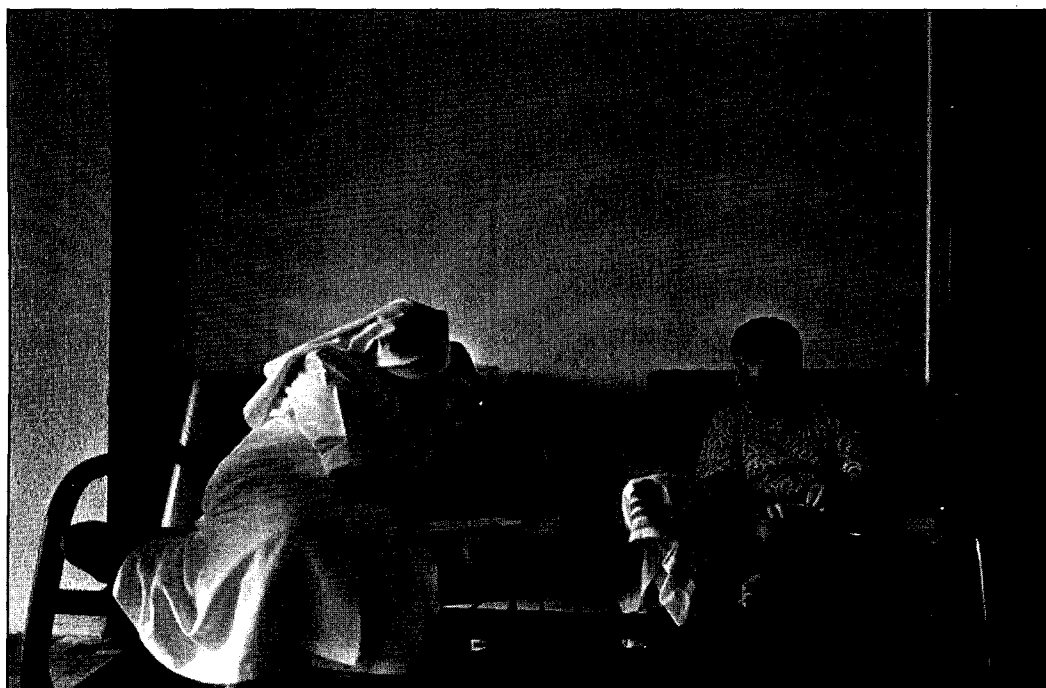
larly said that she justifies it in that she'd rather give them money for work than have them get it illegally. When I told her that some of the kids skip school to work the fair, she seemed dismayed.

One of the mornings that Susan and I were near the fruit stands, I noticed two young adults in yellow shirts talking with a group of the market kids. The adults had backpacks and badges, so I thought they might belong to some social organization (they ended up being part of *Projeto Aruaí*). Pressed for time for another commitment, I made a mental note to look into this later.

## HOOKING INTO THE SCENE

Locals in São José dos Campos told us that the city has a reputation for generosity. In very little time, the contacts we made put us in touch with some pretty amazing individuals and groups working to alleviate the social problems that existed in the area.

We met Sister Lais, a 60-ish, superwoman-nun who, among other projects, had founded a home for severely disabled kids, many who'd been abandoned. The home is called the *Obra Social e Assistencial, Madre Teresa* (Social and Welfare Work, Mother Theresa), named after the head of Sister Lais' order<sup>3</sup> (and not the Mother Theresa of India). The home, with 14 children and four adults, had been running for 14 years solely on donations. As we walked through the home, some of the non-ambulatory children and adults followed us with their eyes. The kids who were mobile ran straight to us, excited by the new guests, hands stretched out for contact. As I looked



Sister Lais makes the rounds, hugging the 22 residents of the home for the severely disabled that she founded and has run for 14 years.

3 "Pequenas Missionarias de Maria Imaculada," or Small Missionaries of Maria Immaculada



*For five years, every Friday night, Celso Rodolfo Da Luz (right) has been hitting the streets of São José dos Campos delivering food, drink, and clothing to the homeless.*

at each face, Sister Lais would lower her voice and almost whisper some horrible story of how they arrived.

As one of the boys, William, ran off with Susan's straw hat, Sister Lais said that his parents had kept him with their dogs in an outdoor kennel. They feared that William's contact with their other sons might infect them. Sister Lais illegally invaded their home, shot pictures, took the testimony of neighbors, and convinced a judge to put the child in her care. As explanation for such inhuman treatment, Sister Lais says that people are ashamed of deformities and that the culture of "machismo" prevalent in Brazil won't allow for such "defects."<sup>4</sup>

As we entered a nicely painted room with three cribs, Sister Lais warned me not to take pictures of one of the babies with a severe physical deformity because her father was looking for her. He had threatened to kill her. According to the Sister, he believed that the little girl could not possibly be his because she was deformed. Mostly because of this threat, the modest house had chains and locks on the front gate.

Looking into other social programs, we met a group of young people who hit the streets of São José dos Campos every Friday night to give soup to homeless people. The soup idea grew out of an experiment Celso Rodolfo Da Luz tried in December of 1993. He dressed himself as if he were on the streets — filthy, ripped clothing, stink-

ing, smelling of alcohol — to see how the public treated him. He went to the same Christmas Eve mass that his friends attended, but none of them recognized him. He said that they never looked at his face. He then tried entering a shopping mall and a MacDonalds, but couldn't get past the guards at the doors. According to Celso, as he prayed about this the simple idea of making soup and bringing it to the hungry entered his mind. For the past five years, he has enlisted his family and friends to do this every Friday night.

Accompanying them was like watching India's Mother Theresa on MTV. We cruised around the city in two cars, connected by walkie-talkies and blasting rock and roll. A huge container of chicken soup, bread and clothing lay in the back of one car as we searched in corners and under bridges for where the homeless might be. They knew the hiding places that people on the street use for privacy, and would find groups of adults and children in hiding places I would have passed. What impressed me was that along with giving soup, they made a special effort to talk with everyone, asking about their lives, what they needed, what they could bring the next Friday night.

When we arrived at an auto-supply store where about 20 men had set up cardboard for sleeping, the guys said that a nun had already dropped off food. The duplication was frustrating, but the fact that different groups

4 An article in the Brazilian magazine "ISTOE" exposed the fact that many people keep their physically and mentally handicapped family members locked away or even chained up. The report focused on this happening in the state of Sergipe, which lies in the Northeast of the country.

were trying to do this kind of work was promising. Indeed, they said that every night of the week people are going out into the streets feeding the homeless.

It was actually during our soup adventure that another friend mentioned *Projeto Aruaí*, group working with street kids. She didn't know too much about it, but she gave us the address.

On a cool, overcast day, Susan and I started out to find the organization. What started out as a nice walk turned into a soggy sprint as the skies darkened and drops splattered on the sidewalk. Unannounced and soaking wet we arrived at the small house with a big padlock on the front gate. Once inside we asked for information on the organization, but the director, Lucia Elena do Carmo Salviato, insisted on giving us a complete tour.

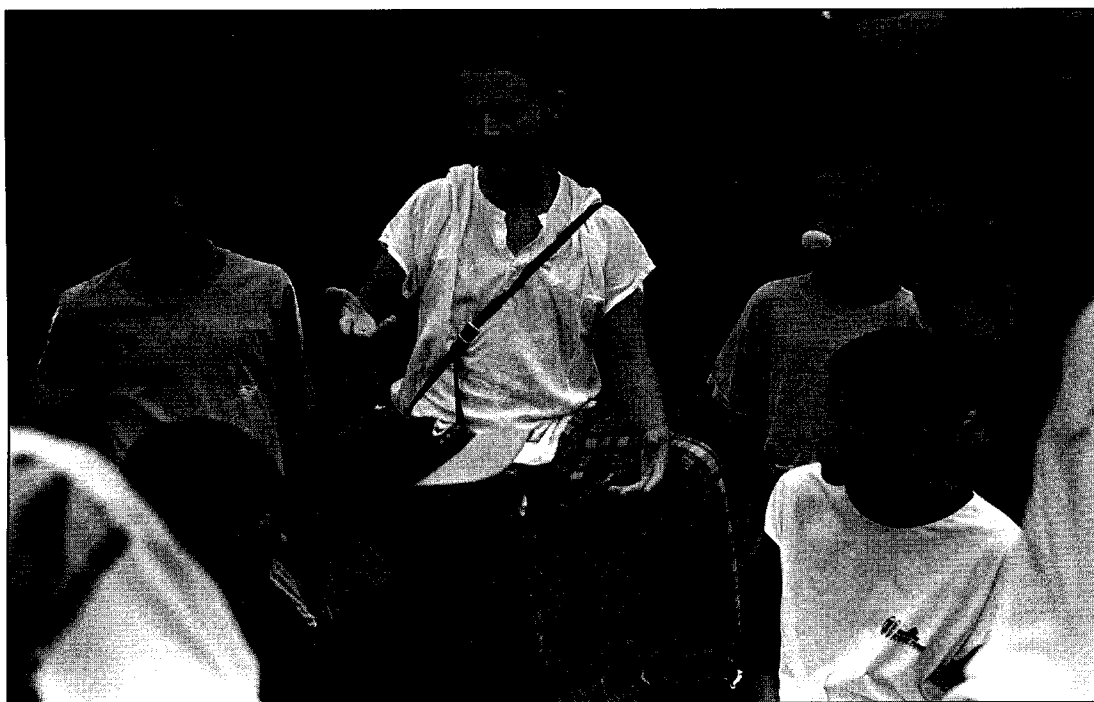
She started with overall information. The name comes from the indigenous Tupi-Guarani language and means "*ser feliz*" or "be happy." The program is four years old, and helps "*meninos e meninas da rua*" (boys and girls on the street), ages eight to 18. The work is divided between kids who are truly living on the streets, and those who work in the streets but still have some sort of home life. According to Lúcia, about 30 kids might be sleeping on the streets of São José dos Campos at any one time, whereas about 300 are registered in their programs for kids working in the streets. It is the only program in the city working with such youth.

For those in the worst situations of homelessness,

drug-addiction or prostitution, *Projeto Aruaí* provides temporary shelter, a transition place to begin the process of getting off the streets and back to a home life, be it with their families or foster care. Some kids have spent months at the shelter, others just a couple of days. The shelter occupies the back of the little house, which also operates as administration offices and a hangout area for shelter monitors and for street educators. The latter are *Projeto Aruaí's* arms into the community, finding the kids who are sleeping in the streets and helping the ones who are working there.

In the time I spent there, the number of kids in the shelter ranged from one to six. They had communal bedrooms separated by gender, a TV room and a bathroom. The walls of the bedrooms were covered with remnants of adolescent posters and stickers that had been put up by one child and taken down by another. With some graffiti mixed in, it had the feel of summer camp. Since the physical divisions between shelter and office were not too well defined, the scene felt energized. People flowed back and forth; homeless kids and adults mingled in the kitchen. It all seemed pretty natural, like a large family. Usually the mood was pretty light, with lots of horseplay. However, when tempers flared about wanting to leave or wanting drugs, tension dominated the whole house.

The majority of *Projeto Aruaí's* work focuses on kids who aren't homeless but are "at-risk" — poor, working in the streets, and either using or exposed to drugs. The basic idea is to get the kids off the streets, off drugs, and off to school. What chance these kids have to get the kind



*Rogério Marcos de Olivera, an educator with Projeto Aruaí, talks with a group of at-risk youth that participate in one of the street dance workshops.*

of jobs they dream of would be impossible if they didn't finish school.

To do this, the program uses a carrot-and-stick approach. The educators approach kids in the streets, markets, wherever, and dangle the prospect of getting involved with some of the cool workshops they offer. *Projeto Aruaí* has classes teaching rap, break dance, *capoeira*<sup>5</sup>, choral singing, paper-making, soccer, AIDS/STD awareness, etc. Each workshop is a chance to learn an activity and to learn about their lives. At the end of every class, lunch is provided: sandwiches and juice. Once the educators hook the kids on the activities they have some leverage because the kids must stay in school to continue with them.

Besides this, the educators also act as advocates, helping families if they have problems with schools or courts. For example, even though the Brazilian constitution guarantees children an education, there isn't always room in the local schools for them. If they can't get in, they have to sit out the term. Since my time with them fell at the beginning of the school year, this was one of the main topics of conversation between the *Projeto Aruaí* educators and parents. After they have finished school, the organization tries to help young adults with professional training and job placement.

I became very interested in the work of the street educators, and started hanging out with one of the teams, Rogerio and Margareth, mentioned above. Both are in their twenties with hippie-style clothing — that called attention to them in São José dos Campos. The children called Rogerio “Jesus” a lot; his hair reaches to his shoulder blades. Their working styles complement each other, with Rogerio using laughter to build trust, and Margareth physically embracing the children. It didn't surprise me when they told me they intended to get married. Their whole world revolved around this work with *Projeto Aruaí*, and fire lit in their eyes as they talked about it.

Every morning at seven a.m., Rogerio and Margareth made their first rounds of the city. In the brightly painted *Projeto Aruaí* VW bus, they followed roughly the same path as the soup people to find kids sleeping on the streets. Following that, they returned to the main office to coordinate whether they would attend the workshops of the day or head into the neighborhoods to meet with kids and families.

On our journeys around the city I saw the spread-out, working-poor *barrios*. What the city lacked in stereotypical scenes of street kids begging from cars on congested streets, it made up for with these fields of cookie-

cutter, cement-block homes. According to the locals, these were havens for crime and drugs — especially since São José lies on the major drug route between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

The drive out to one of these *barrios*, *Campos Alemaes*<sup>6</sup> (German fields), is a straight shot from the main highway that cuts through São José. First, we passed through *Satelite*, a middle-class neighborhood with functional-but-nice stores on the main avenue. Then we hit *Bosque Eucalyptos*, where the buildings are a bit rougher, and the homes more modest. Toward this area most windows sported security grating, showing increased concern about break-ins. With a declining number of businesses alongside, the paved road crested a hill and reappeared in the distance as only dirt. Margareth pointed toward the treeless expanse of small houses, mud and traffic, saying “Campos.”

In the 1980's the city wanted to use the land occupied by a large *favela* near the center of town as the site for a new city hall. For those being displaced, the city bulldozed the land in *Campos Alemaes* (about a 40-minute bus ride away) and constructed new homes. According to Margareth, the transfer of people to these homes involved some political intrigue. Although all of the houses were ready at a certain point, the politicians delayed the entry of the families until closer to election time. They wanted to use the “gift” of the homes as a way to ensure votes. All at once, as she describes it, the families invaded the area, forcing their way into homes meant for them.

*Campos Alemaes*: mud and cement in a country of lush beauty. The ruts from the rains are deep enough to strand even the van we were driving. Though the dirt roads are as wide as avenues, narrow passable areas forced cars to go single file in many areas. We struggled along, Rogerio and Margareth shooting the thumbs-up “*tudo bem*” to kids and families of kids enrolled in the program.

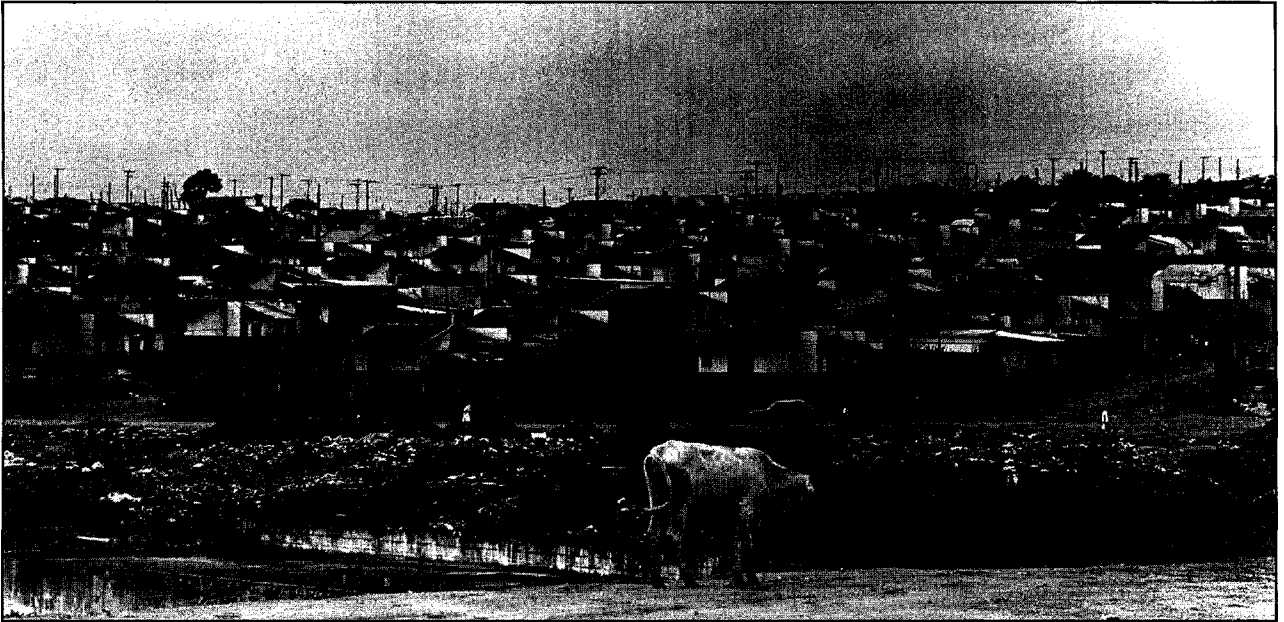
Whether it was in *Campos Alemaes*, the *favelas* of Santa Ana to the north, or the city center, the van would stop at any sign of a kid who might be sleeping on the street. Rogerio and Margareth knew most of them, some because they had been in some of the workshops, some because they had crashed at the transition house. Regardless, they would try to convince them to let *Projeto Aruaí* help again.

Following them as they walked around the city center, I witnessed a rather shocking challenge to Rogerio and Margareth's idealism. It opened my eyes to why other Brazilians might not share their point of view. The two spotted a boy of about 11 begging from passing cars at a

<sup>5</sup> Capoeira combines dance and martial arts and was brought from Angola by slaves in the sixteenth century. Its important history as a form of resistance by the slaves (it was prohibited until the 1920's), and as artistic expression warrants an entire newsletter.

<sup>6</sup> The name comes from the fact that years ago the area had been a ranch owned by a group of Germans. It had been abandoned, though, and taken over by the city.



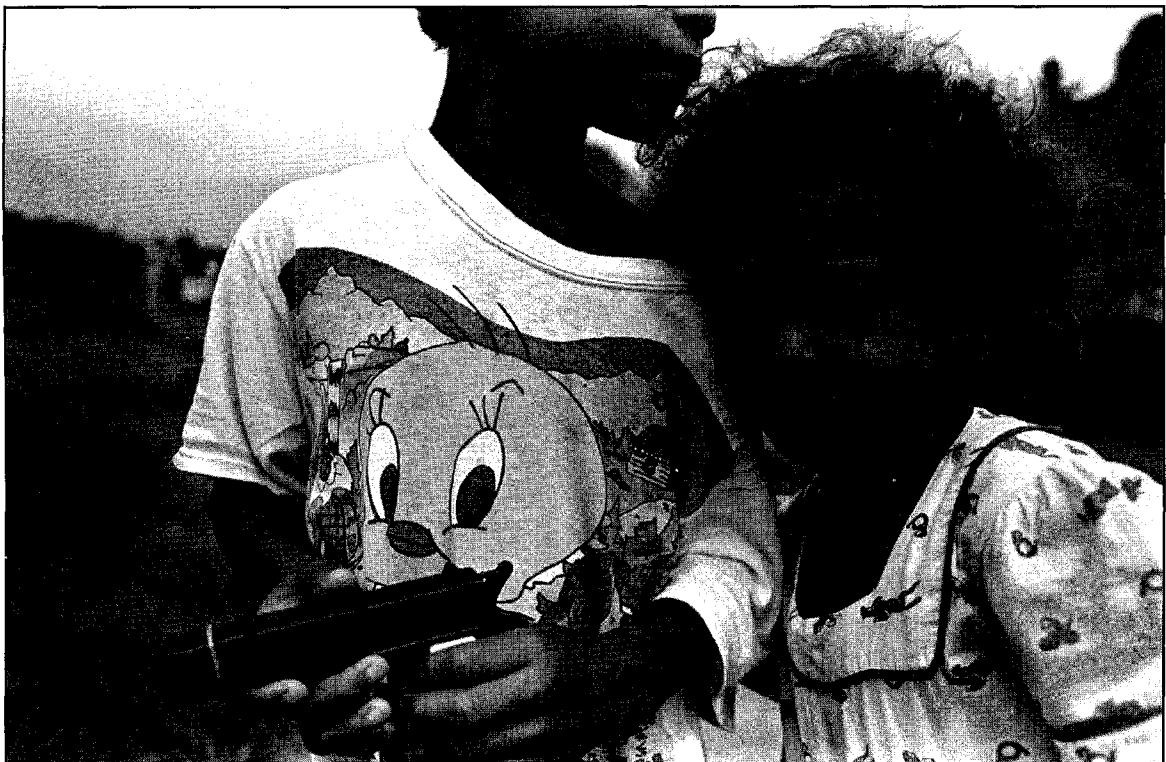


*A look at part of the neighborhood of Campos Alemaes*

stoplight, a youth I recognized from my experiences in the *Banhado* favela.<sup>7</sup> Face dirty, clothes ripped, no shoes. As we approached, another boy appeared with a plate of chicken and rice — the two were friends and were begging together. We sat on the edge of a little planted area, with Rogerio trying to convince them to leave the streets.

food and threw the garbage into the planted area. An elderly man in casual shorts and an old collared shirt began to pick up the garbage in the garden. He then turned toward our little group, and began chastising the kids for littering and messing up the garden. The two boys jumped up and moved back apprehensively. The man then turned to Rogerio and yelled, “You are living in a dream world, you aren’t going to resolve anything!”

As we talked, the kids finished gobbling down the



*Two children play with a plastic gun outside of an abandoned building in which their families live in Campos Alemaes.*

<sup>7</sup> Refer to TLT-1

Rogério kept his voice steady and tried to answer about how work with homeless youth takes time. The man ignored Rogério, loudly repeated the sentence about the “dream world,” and stomped off.

### JUNINHO, ADIVAN, AND JULIANO

Another day at the market Rogério and Margareth walked around to talk to the kids, remind them of upcoming events, and make sure that they weren’t skipping school. They told me that only the younger kids worked at the *feiras* (if they were 14 or 15, they usually were small in size and looked younger). Older youths were seen as vagabonds and were not trusted with shopping bags by the customers.

Juninho, the “*tapa-deixe*” victim, was always there with his soft voice and cute smile. He worked with many regular customers, including an American friend of ours. He said that he liked the “gringos” because they tipped more. A smart kid, he surprised Susan and me one day by discussing the devalued Brazilian *Real* and the current exchange rate.

Juninho seemed to lead the average life of a kid in the *Projeto Aruaí* program. One of five children, his parents were separated and he lived with his mother, two brothers, an uncle and a grandmother in *Campos Alemaes*. He said that usually his mother worked as a maid, but did not have a job right now. They lived off of the “*pensão*” (child support) his father paid and what his uncle brought in. Even though his mother disapproved, Juninho traveled by bus every Tuesday and Friday to the *feiras* to work. He had told her that he would just go anyway if she forbade him.

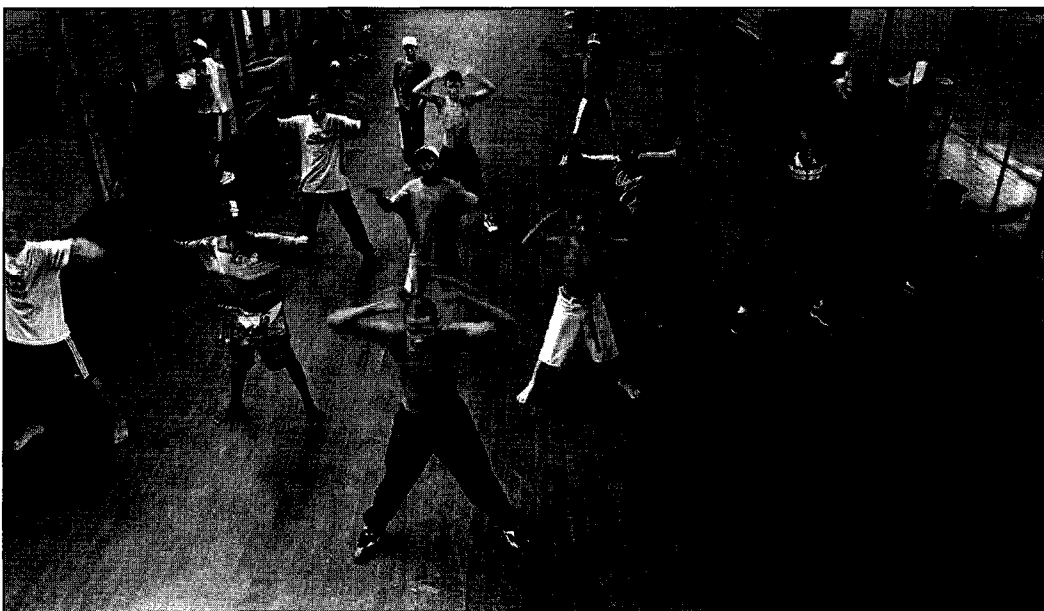
Monthly, he averaged around R\$60 (U.S.\$30) at the

*feiras*, about half the minimum wage — not bad for an eleven-year-old. Of the money that he made, half went to his family and half stayed with him to buy food, or even spend on “*Fliperama*,” a local video game. Juninho did not skip school to work, so he said, and his dream was to work as an educator like Rogério and Margareth.

Most of the other kids are in similar situations. Some have been on drugs, others not. But they either are working or have worked on the street, carrying sacks like Juninho, guarding cars, shining shoes. Some have even worked directly in the drug trade as “*avioes*” (literally “airplanes,” but more like carriers or “mules” in English). Talking with them, I always asked about their dreams and they ranged from doctor and lawyer to teacher, or to any job at a good factory.

As an example of *Projeto Aruaí* success, they pointed to their street-dance teacher, Adivan dos Santo Sales, 18. He had done exactly what they did, working on the street “*vigiando carros*” (watching cars) making about R\$300/month (U.S.\$150). In getting involved with P.A., he fell in love with street-dance and made it his career. Now, *Projeto Aruaí* and other youth organizations in the city hire him to teach dance. His proudest moment came last year when his street-dance group, using his choreography, won first place in a dance festival in São José dos Campos.

What I remember from attending one of Adivan’s street-dance lessons were the glances and body language of the kids when they first arrived. The guys were older, 14 to 18, and they entered the old workout room in a public park with their bodies cocked. Their eyes darted around the room, seeing who was there. Then, as if someone had walked up and tickled all of them, laughter and greetings started. I got even more attention when they



*Adivan dos Santos Sales, 18, front, who used to work in the streets, now teaches street dancing to kids from Projeto Aruaí as well as other youth groups in the city.*





*Juliano Bernadito Cordero, 15, takes a cocky drag on a cigarette in the alley beside the Projeto Aruaí transition home even though smoking is prohibited. Juliano is homeless, and has been using drugs since he was 10.*

were told I was from the United States. All of the questions spilled out, about Michael Jordan, about rap music, about whether we had drugs and violence like in the movies.

On the other extreme, P.A. handles some very hard cases — like Juliano Bernadito Cordero, 15. The first words out of his mouth were lies: he told me he was from Rio de Janeiro and bragged that he had been in FEBEM. According to the P.A. people he is actually from São José and had never been in any penal institution. This was the same that I had heard the same sort of bravado about jail time among gang members in the U.S.

An emotional kid with riveting brown eyes, a chest he likes to puff up for pictures and a small angel-like tattoo on his shoulder, Juliano had been living on the streets for a year. As easy as it was to take his picture, it was just that hard to get him to talk about his past. His mood swings would go from manic playfulness to unfocused rage. It made him restless when he talked about his father, who was killed by drug traffickers when he was four, and about his mother, who left about that time and never returned.

“I miss my father, I miss my father,” he would repeat. Then, switching the subject, he’d want me to speak some “gringo” to him. Getting back to his life, he said, “I started smoking pot and crack when I was ten, the same year I left school.”

When I asked him whether he wanted to quit drugs, his voice lost the bravado. “Yes, I want to quit, but stop-

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*Juliano peers over the fence of Projeto Aruaí in search of a handout of a prohibited cigarette from a passerby. It was over this fence that he left to escape the transition home. He said that he left to buy and smoke crack cocaine. He returned the next day.*

ping is so hard for me." These are almost the same words that appeared in a *Folha de São Paulo* article about *Projeto Aruaí* and that featured Juliano. The article hangs near his bed. A photo shows him, with his back to the camera for anonymity, near a window in the shelter. As I tried to talk to him more about this, he walked away toward the front gate to bum a cigarette from a passerby.

The rest of the story I got from the P.A. people. He was raised by his grandmother, and after he started drugs, he also started to steal to support his habit. Eventually, he stole his grandmother's TV and VCR, selling them for R\$50 (about U.S.\$25). After that his grandmother wouldn't let him stay with her. She and the rest of his family feared him. No one wanted him.

According to Priscilla, one of the transition-house monitors, it is hard to help kids like change their lives and leave the streets. In the first place there's their physical dependence. Also, they become accustomed to street life. Things are very black and white. There's either food or no food, drugs or no drugs, etc. They are free to do what they want and when. By comparison, "normal" life off the streets is very complicated, with all its rules and social structures.

Street kids also switch back and forth between being adults and children. Juliano and Carlinhos, another boy in the shelter, sat on the floor with children's modeling clay (Play-Dough) in front of them. Juliano held out his hand, and I realized they were fashioning pretend "crack" cocaine from the clay. They told me that each piece ran about R\$5 (about U.S.\$2.50), and that they easily bought the drugs in the *Banhado favela*. Carlinhos, refugee-thin, fashioned a crack pipe from the modeling clay.

Another day I sat with Juliano watching TV as one of the monitors put on a movie they had rented from Blockbuster Video. Before long, scenes of violence and drug trafficking were blaring over the set. Juliano perked up and explained that it was about a *favela* in Rio that was so violent the police never enter. He loved seeing the guns and the cocaine — until another monitor came in and realized what kind of movie had been rented. With art imitating life a bit too much, they yanked out the tape and resumed regular TV.

I witnessed Juliano escape from *Projeto Aruaí* one day. The house is not a prison, but the locked gate does provide some control of movement. I was returning from accompanying Rogerio on one of his rounds when we ran into Carlinhos outside of the gate. He had just jumped the fence (which is not very difficult) and was talking about going to get drugs. On the inside, Juliano fumed over not being able to leave, not being able to smoke cigarettes. As we talked to Carlinhos down the block, Juliano put his leg over the fence, and jumped down. He walked by confidently, motioned to Carlinhos and shouted

loudly that they were going to get some crack.

Looking at Rogerio, I asked if they were telling the truth. He said that they probably would try to get drugs, that fighting their addictions is hard. He disagreed with the rule at *Projeto Aruaí* that forbade smoking cigarettes. He pointed out that the monitors were not required to quit, and sneaked away for clandestine smokes throughout the day. Often the kids wanted to jump the wall just to get cigarettes. He thought that having them quit every vice all at once was too harsh.

I asked if they would be back. Rogerio bet that at least Juliano would return, if only because he had no where else to go.

## CONCLUSIONS AND OTHER THOUGHTS

In retrospect, I think it was good for me to begin looking at youth issues in São José dos Campos rather than in a big city or the Northeast. The work with *Projeto Aruaí* took me out of just looking for kids living on the streets, and brought me into the lives of the many more children who have homes, but still face real threats every day.

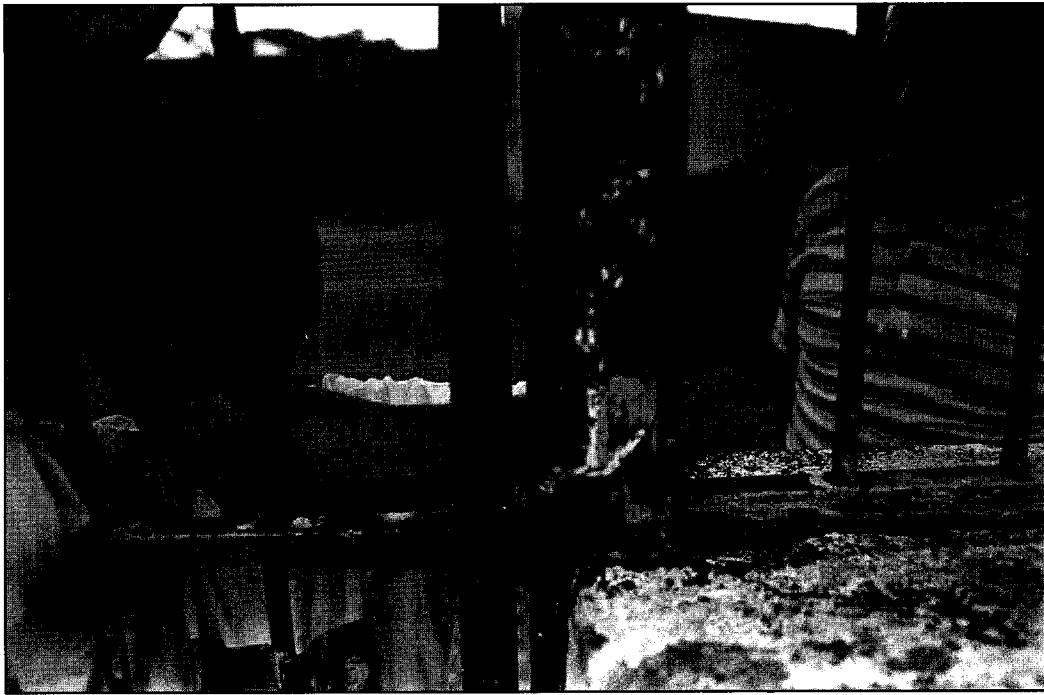
I come away from my time looking at *Projeto Aruaí* impressed at the job they did connecting with the world of youth in São José. They opened a shelter for the homeless kids, and went into the community to find out what the problems were for the rest of the at-risk youth population and what they could do to help.

As I think about the different cases they handle, the ones living on the streets, like Juliano, stand out. They are the children in the most immediate danger, and the priority is obvious — getting them off of the streets and off of drugs. The work will take a lot of time and energy, but the goal is clear-cut.

For the kids who are working in the streets and "at-risk," goals are harder to define. What does a young person need to make a productive life, or avoid daily temptation and danger? Beyond getting through school, how is success defined? Can these children overcome their socio-economic status and achieve the kinds of lives and jobs that they talked about with me?

The issues become more murky when taking Brazil's current economic situation into account. With unemployment rising, as well as prices, families are being hard hit. Economic crises do not favor social and education spending by the government. All belts are being tightened, and programs like *Projeto Aruaí* can help only so much. In this light, the R\$60 a month that Juninho brings in could mean the survival of his family. How does a family choose between its basic daily needs and the distant future for their child?

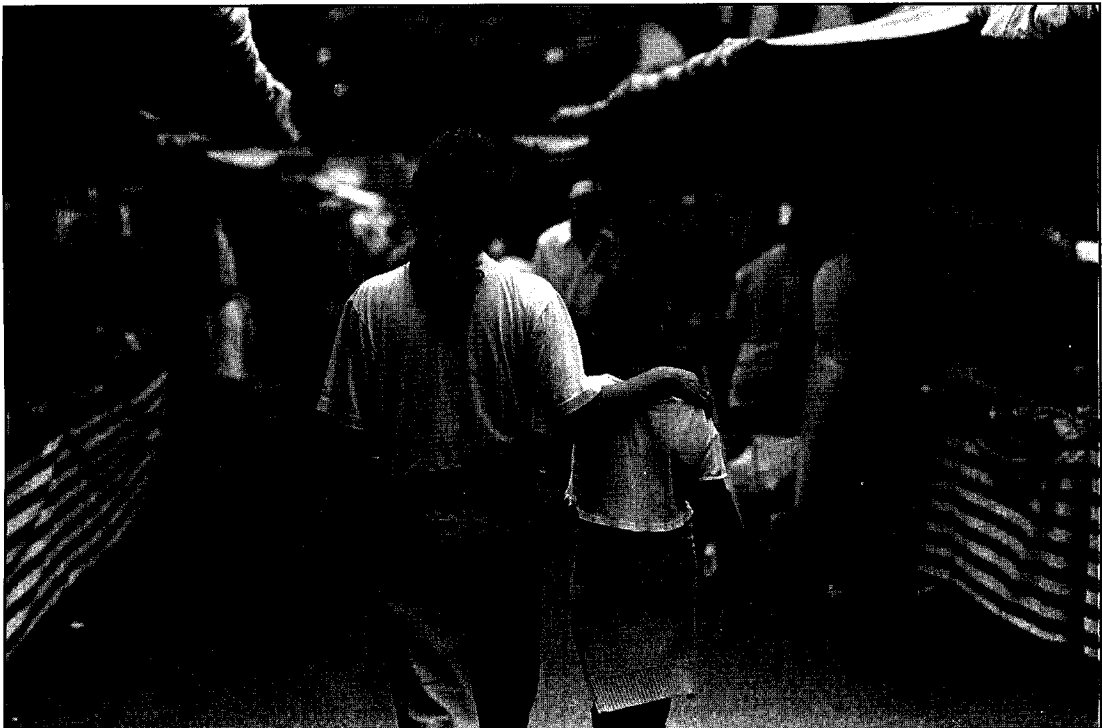
However intractable these problems seem, small vic-



*"Junior" leans against the fence of the Projeto Aruaí home as he and his father prepare to go home. Junior was on the streets for six weeks.*

tories occurred everyday. A father came to pick up his son, Junior, 13, who had been on the streets for about six weeks. The two stood side-by-side on the outside of the gate, peering in, waiting for some items of Junior's to be brought out before going home. The tension between the

two was palpable, and I wondered about their past, and their future. I asked the father about the boy's absence, to see how he would react. He said that he didn't know where the boy had been, but he was glad he was finally coming home. □



*Rogerio (left) walks through one of the feiras in São José dos Campos. The girl with him, 13, her brother, and her cousin all work in the market carrying bags for tips.*

