

## **The Transformation of Fischer Village**

We would like to share with you a portion of a report by George Otis, Jr. of the Sentinel Group from a recent trip to Brazil. We desire to share these stories with you from time-to-time to encourage you to continue praying for the transformation of your community. This and other stories will be posted on our "Stories" page.

Our first stop on the FireQuest tour (immediately following the Torchlight Summit) report was a transformed community just outside the city of Teresópolis. While at first glance the village (known as Fischer) doesn't look like much, our appreciation for the miracle before us grew as the story unfolded. In short, many of the inhabitants of Fischer Village are families who have been given new life—physically, emotionally and spiritually—after years of trying to survive in a nearby garbage dump filled with medical waste. The turning point came when a young couple, James and Andrea Alvarez, witnessed a tug of war between a child and a vulture—all for a scrap of rancid food. As highly trained physicians, they understood the desperation, and the danger, that lay behind these daily dramas. But they didn't just look, they acted! Laying down their comfortable lives, they petitioned God for the courage and the wisdom to become societal change agents.

As we moved from house to house in the Fischer Village our hearts were stirred by the Father's answer to these selfless prayers. The testimonies seemed to bubble up from a sweet water well. Healing from leprosy, hepatitis and cirrhosis. Deliverance from drug addiction, spiritism and poverty. The provision of homes, jobs and hopes. The restoration of families and futures. Transformation in living color. Many of the women showed us beautiful baskets and handicrafts they had made out of newspapers recovered from the trash. As we held these items in our hands, the redemptive metaphor was unavoidable. So, too, were the testimonies of children that adorned the walls of the small village school. Using the simplest of tools, the young students had created a wonderful art gallery that depicted the realization of a long held dream—happy families.

Photography was a touchy subject here. The reason, we soon learned, was because a parade of outside parties—many of them politicians—were eager to take credit for the recent changes in Fischer Village. The locals, however, will have none of it. As they well know—and this includes the non-believers among them—their glorious transformation has not been man's doing.

### **Into the Boca de Fumo**

Patricia's story was easily the most dramatic we encountered in Fischer Village. Unlike the others, however, it did not originate in the infamous garbage dump. Rather, Patricia's saga began on the mean streets of Rio de Janeiro, or to be more precise, in a deadly, drug-infested favela known as the Boca de Fumo, or "mouth of smoke." The details blew us away. The story is too long and textured to recount here. Suffice it to say that by the age of 17 Patricia had been sold by her mother for \$32, brutally gang raped, left in a coma for three months, forced to live on the streets with three children, forced into prostitution, shot three times, overdosed four times—and had herself killed a man.

Seeking to escape this hellish existence, Patricia decided to pursue a form of spiritism known as Candomblé. As she led us to the center where she was initiated—a bleak building situated amidst vines, graves and chicken heads impaled on spikes—she explained that she was reduced to drinking blood and eating animal excrement for a period of three weeks. She took solace in the fact that her income would soon come not from prostitution, but from divination.

Leaving the city after her initiation, she packed up her children and headed into the hills above Rio. Her final destination was an obscure little place called Fischer Village. Unfortunately, things did not work out quite as planned. Instead of finding a ready clientele of superstitious women, Patricia found herself shunned by a community that had repudiated witchcraft in all its forms. With nowhere else to turn, she cried out to God for help.

The following day Patricia met Andrea Alvarez—and shortly thereafter, her best friend and savior, Jesus Christ. The transformation was both immediate and profound. Today her house, which is situated on the main village square, bears her new testimony. The message, painted in large lettering, is unmistakable—“The House of Blessings.”

To help us tell her story, Patricia took us to each station of her former life—the dangerous favelas, the spirit house, and the brothel. The latter, which almost defies description, was the worst. In fact, to call it a brothel at all is to grossly understate the case. The place where Patricia used to ply her trade is in actuality a sex city. Three tiers of brothels rise up from both sides of the street like Asian temples. At night, when the throbbing music and garish neon comes on, the entire neighborhood is pervaded by an atmosphere of danger and demonic lust.

Before we could film in the area, Patricia had to enter the zone on her own to gain the permission of the local mafia. After a long absence she came back with their response. “They have agreed to let you film,” she said, “but you must be quick about it.” Looking at me and my cameraman she added: “You will need to enter the zone as if you are customers. And the camera will need to be taken out of the case and disguised under a coat.” Needless to say, it was quite an experience. Leading us up the dark stairs of the brothel, Patricia took us into the small, cell-like rooms where she conducted her business. Standing on the dirty cot, she pointed to a grate in the wall. “Many times,” she told us, “I would put my face up to these slats and scream for help. But no one ever heard us over the blaring music. So I did what was required of me and then injected drugs to cover my pain.” The video footage is powerful.

Day after day Patricia told us her story with great courage. In fact, she only broke down once—in the van after we had exited the sex city. After sobbing on Andrea’s shoulder, she lifted her reddened eyes and said: “Only those who have lived here can know the pain.” And with that we headed back to the House of Blessings.

**The Sentinel Group – Brazil 2008 Ministry Report**