

LET FREEDOM RING-SEMPRE

VITALMIRO BASTOS (BIDA) MARCH 31 & APRIL 12-CONVICTED-30 YRS

REGIVALDO GALVAO (TARADAO) APRIL 30-CONVICTED-30 YEARS

Three journeys to Belem Brazil in less than 40 days were not something I had planned for nor expected. I wish to thank the many American people supporting these journeys and the journeys of the bus loads of farmers from Anapu to Belem for the trials.

Several important events were happening upon arrival and before the trial of Regivaldo. First, a Government witness, for the trial of Regivaldo, Roniery who had been shot five times, in the mouth, leg, back and arms several months earlier had survived. He was being hidden by the people for obvious reasons. He had however secretly been taped recorded and his testimony was released the day before the trial. Roniery, who was Regivaldo's Foreman claimed that Regivaldo owned many ranches, under different peoples' names supposedly amounting to over a million acres; that Regivaldo was involved in stealing of land, money laundering, slave labor, destruction of Public Land; that Regivaldo has strong relations with many politicians and other important people in the state of Para; that Regivaldo was diverting resources from the coffers of the State; and that the murder of Dorothy Stang was far from being unimportant to Regivaldo. Needless to say the press printed his testimony, and created new excitement for this upcoming trial. Secondly, the Minister of Human Rights Paulo Vanucci flew into Belem the evening before the trial to attend a meeting at the Federal University and called for a press conference inviting Sr. Jane, Sr. Becky, Flavio Pachalski, a specialist in infocommunications and myself to be with him, in our presence, he declared that Regivaldo needs to be convicted. He then called the four of us into a private room with him for over an hour to let us know that the Government wishes to see this man Regivaldo in jail.

April 30th arrived and the trial turned out to be historic for the State of Para, where no land baron has ever been convicted except for Vitamiro Bastos (Bida) who was just convicted April 12th. I am still feeling proud to have seen, touched and been present at these predatory criminals convictions. Justice which just never seemed possible was delivered clearly and with unbelievable force. Again since Brazil's Independence, and the creation of the State of Para no prominent land baron, rancher had been convicted for their crimes. Now, two well known thugs are sentenced to thirty years. These two trials of April 12th and April 30th, spoke loudly of justice to the press, to peoples' hearts even to the top of the Brazilian Government. Present at the April 30th trial was Brazil, prominent lawyers from Rio de Janeiro, Brazilia, Fortaleza, even President Lula's personal representative was clearly present! You could feel the palpitation of hope and freedom in the crowd, among those hundreds of people supporting Dorothy, waiting in lines to enter the courtroom and never entering due to no more room in the courtroom. This trial spoke to the hearts of the poor, to the taxi cab drivers, even to the police, to those who sleep all night outside on the cement. When the conviction of Regivaldo was announced people outside the court began waving, chanting, dancing and hugging each other. "We won" was heard everywhere among the common people, in the city of Belem and even in other cities of Brazil. All five criminals involved in Dorothy Stang's murder are now convicted. It hardly seems real. They were all known as thugs, thieves, known for their oppression. The people of Anapu, the poor have not forgotten the 1500 other murders in the Amazon in the last 20 years with no justice, no one in jail for these crimes. Leaving the courtroom at 2AM after sitting for 17 hours, for us inside, now hearing the people outside dancing and singing, made the five year struggle quite memorable. My/our sister Dorothy Stang received justice. Let justice begin.

Some stories about the trial of Regivaldo now need to be written down and passed on for people to remember this great event. Most of the other trials are clearly shown in the movie, "They Killed Sister Dorothy". Having a grandstand seat in the front row with Sr. Becky, Sr. Ani, Sr. Katy, we could see, the lawyer from the Ministry of Human Rights representing Pres. Lula. He was deep in thought wondering what he would tell his boss if we lost because there were times where the lies, the false spinning of events by the defense lawyers, the prejudice, were so thick and so heavily presented that every one was concerned. Since perjury is not a criminal offense you can imagine how diverse and well spun the arguments in this

rebuttal system of law can go. Regivaldo was even told by the Judge that the law as it stands does allow him to lie and that he does not have to respond to any questions asked him by the Prosecutors.

How do you respond in a courtroom where you are not allowed to respond and the defense lawyer turns to you, states your Family name, stares at you and wraps the Brazilian flag around him and says “we don’t need the presence of American violence here?” As the trial continues the defense lawyers proceed to insult the Brazilian government, the police, the poor, blaming them all for the confusion that they instilled in poor Regivaldo, who is now a good Christian and cannot lie. Yes it is these inept Government people who are destroying the Amazon, not this poor persecuted Christian Family Man Regivaldo, who is being wrongly persecuted just like Jesus Christ so say the defense lawyers who yelled at us and the jurors. The defense lawyers continued to state that INCRA (a government land agency) was run by incompetent leaders and that Lot 55 where Dorothy was murdered was Regivaldo’s land. To prove this point, the Defense Lawyers called as one of their witnesses Liberio a broker in the buying and selling of land. He claimed that Lot 55 was cleared to buy and he sold it to Regivaldo. This statement contradicted the statement of the Superintendent of INCRA for the area of Anapu, Superintendent Bruno. Liberio’s testimony was quickly proved false. As a result, the defense lawyers demanded that Superintendent Bruno have a face to face meeting with Regivaldo, regarding Lot 55. You can only imagine the fear Superintendent Bruno felt waiting for this confrontation with a known organized crime leader in the area where Bruno lived also. When he was called to sit with Regivaldo, the Judge asked the Superintendent one question, “What did you tell Regivaldo regarding Lot 55. With enormous courage the Superintendent said looking at Regivaldo, “I told him that Lot 55 was public land and that Lot 55 was not for sale.” Regivaldo at this statement became very agitated and he yelled at Superintendent Bruno, calling him a “liar.” The Judge told Regivaldo to shut up. The Judge then asked Superintendent Bruno, if what he said was the truth? The courtroom was deadly silent when he responded, “yes what I said, was true.” Obviously, the Defense Lawyers had hoped that Superintendent Bruno would be too afraid to speak the truth. Can you imagine if Regivaldo had won and he kept this Lot 55? Can you imagine what in reality would have happened in Anapu, in the Projects of Sustainable Development? Would not every persons’ land in the Amazon be at risk? The bets in the streets are that Superintendent Bruno’s life is in danger and he won’t live the year out.

The web of lies were so continuous and Regivaldo being led by the defense lawyers to show himself as innocent, was making everyone nervous. Would the Jury believe these stories, these arguments that he is just a poor simple rancher raising a Christian Family, buying land that he was supposedly told was free and clear of any legal impediments, especially since the Prosecutors were not allowed to question him because he stated his unwillingness to answer their questions?

The Prosecutors however now had a right to present their own arguments and Nilo Batista, a very famous Criminal Lawyer from Rio de Janeiro stood and said, “Regivaldo you are a liar, a thief, involved in slavery, money laundering, and a destroyer of our Amazonian Sanctuary and I have proof”. He stated Ronieri’s documents and then brought out Dorothy Stang’s letters over the years where Dorothy clearly stated Regivaldo’s illegal activity on Lot 55, his gunmen terrorizing the farmers, burning down their houses, and because of Dorothy’s letters to the government Regivaldo was fined over a million and a half dollars for illegal deforestation and labor fines for slavery. Therefore Regivaldo, claimed Prosecutor Nilo, “ you are no innocent man and you knew Dorothy Stang very well and when Lot 55 was taken from you, you had many reasons to now murder her”. When Nilo was finished parts of the film “They Killed Sister Dorothy” were shown to a very quiet courtroom where it was obvious that Regivaldo’s attention was caught as he became red, redder and finally purple as the film not only deflated Regivaldo but also showed the corruption of this defense team.

The Jury left for their small cubicles to vote yes or no. Within a half hour they and the Judge returned. The courtroom became very quiet as the Judge declared Regivaldo a convicted criminal and that he will be in jail for 30 years, that he must pay for the trial and that he will be put in jail immediately. Justice was no longer delayed. People, at this time, were very proud of their Government.

We now wish for the courts to be more pro active, for what happens to those million acres, the fines, the money laundering? There are other pods of organized crime in the Anapu area, some were mentioned at the trial. Hopefully, these trials open the door to further convictions. We feel the struggle continues.

I need to mention the importance of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, not only because of our Sister Dorothy Stang being a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, but because these other Notre Dame de Namur sisters too have given their blood over many years to Brazil and to the poor. Spending hours, days, months and years with these great women and watching their dedication has instilled me with new strength and a new understanding of their great belief in freedom, and their option for the poor. Before leaving Belem I went to their ceremony recognizing three young Brazilian women dedicating their lives for three more years as Notre Dame de Namur aspirants. There present were the 8 older sisters in their 60's, 70, and 80's and 12 younger sisters and aspirants in their 20's and 30's all wishing to dedicate themselves to the beautiful beliefs and tradition of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. I felt honored and spiritually strengthened to be present among these great women.

David Stang