

Vá Livre

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36

January 2013

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Dearest Family in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Hello from the Southern Hemisphere with much love to you! We would like to thank you for your prayer for God's Work here in Natal. Just knowing you're praying buoys our spirits and encourages us so much. We have known a real sense of God's Presence, and your prayers on our behalf have brought our Savior so near. We continue to covet the prayer of the Christians and pray for God to encourage you and bless you, in return.

The work on the streets of Natal continues and has opened the way to work in several shantytowns, or favelas, throughout the city. There, the need for the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ far eclipses the physical needs of the people, even though their physical needs are insurmountable.

The child trafficking in the Northeast of Brazil has surpassed, in numbers, that of Thailand. We are starting to notice the signs of this type of abuse and

long for the Lord to do justice for these innocent children.

We need your prayer. Please pray for God to provide the means and the wisdom and the workers to build and work in the home that He would have us build for these children. Pray that He oversees each step of the official government approval, so that it might bring glory, all and only, to Him.

Pray for the work that continues in Aningas, and for the simple Gospel message that is given each Sunday evening. Pray for the teenagers that have professed salvation there, that they might be soon part of a gathering to His Name.

It is our greatest desire that this written update of God's Work here will help you to pray more

intelligently and more earnestly for God to move in power, for His own Name's sake.

We pray that God touches your heart and renews within you a love for Him, a love for others, and an appreciation for all we have in Him.

With Much Love in Our Savior Jesus Christ,

Mark and Lori



Outstretched Arms



She stretches out her arms to show scars. Red and scabbed over. Her brown eyes look up, a smile plays at the corners of her mouth. There's dirt on her orange shirt. It looks like a drawing, something that must have been done with a big brown marker or paint or something other than a burn. She holds them there, thin little arms scarred with her daddy's name and the word father. He burned the words there and she doesn't know any better but to hold them out to Lori for some ointment.

This favela is called City of God. It looks a lot like Kilometer Six; partly finished government housing littered with trash, rotting fruit, and diseased animals. There are sandwiches and juice to fill hungry bellies that crowd around the truck parked in the shade of mango trees. More juice and more sandwiches to those that want more. This temporary fill, the bread that cuts the hollow feel for a little while, it isn't going to fix those arms. There are lots of little faces and older faces and faces that are young but with such old eyes, and they hold onto bread and juice and the attention, a hug, a squeeze on the arm, the pictures being taken. They push and shove and crowd around the camera, smiling silly smiles and funny faces and then they want to see, see.

See me. She holds her arms out to show scars.

The truck with the lunch, and the cameras, and the ointment, it leaves. And the kids keep running barefoot in a slum, hoarding bottles of juice and playing tag and waiting until they see the dust kick up again next week. And it would be useless if that's all it was. Just a temporary fix. But now they have the Word of God. New Testaments, the Gospel of John, all printed in Portuguese and given to everyone who will take one. And sometimes they take the Word and leave the sandwich. They come to the truck and they pass on the juice, but they heard there were bibles and they want one. And they read it and we remember the promise that His word, "will not return unto me void...it shall prosper" (Isaiah 55:1).

When Lori rubs ointment into the scars, another child holds the little girl's hand. They crowd around and watch and say her daddy burned this into their skin. We'd like not to listen and to pretend it was a big brown marker or paint. But she has scars on her arms and scars inside that can't be healed by anything but the scars from the outstretched arms of our Savior. His scars, they can fix permanently. They can come in and speak to a little child and tell of a

daddy that doesn't abuse or abandon. They speak of a perfect love that came to stretch arms out to a dark, lost world.

And the hands that reach out to gather up the little children now bear forever the marks of Calvary. And remind our hearts of the darkness, when Christ's arms were outstretched to gather in the whosoever will, to be wounded and bruised for our sins that by His stripes we may be healed.

When the truck leaves, and bellies are hungry again and scabs peel, they still have His Word. His arms stretched out to show scars.



Feeding the Hungry

The familiar smell of trash and feces suffocates on the drive into Mosquito, the newest favela we've been invited to. Over the railroad tracks and dirt to a badly cobblestoned road that narrows so thin the truck can't get through. Park, hop out, and start passing out the juice and sandwiches.

There are boxes of bibles in the bed of the truck and this is what people are grabbing. They take a sandwich and plop down, backs resting against blue concrete walls. A man with wrinkled brown skin sticks his hand out between the bars of a wrought-iron window. He motions toward the boxes and cups his hands for a bible. He takes it and pulls his arm back.

Visiting the favelas is the primary work with the street kids now. Many who we used to stop and see throughout the city have abandoned their posts on street corners. We aren't sure why, but they seem to have moved on. The street work was our door in. Now instead of eight or nine street stops, we visit the favelas. It started with Cambuim and Kilometer Six. One of the kids invited us, asked us to bring sandwiches and juice. From there we met other kids, other families. We've been invited to new favelas, slums that these men and women and children call home.



You shouldn't walk in uninvited. It's dangerous. Because they know who we are and they know what we are bringing, they welcome us. This first day in Mosquito, the kids are yelling and gathering around and sending messengers to get the others who are too far down the narrow road to see the truck. We see some familiar faces, some from the streets, some who have been in other favelas.

They want the gospel. They ask for it. "Palavra de Deus?" they say, holding out eager hands. We're

happy to give it to them. This is the whole point of coming.

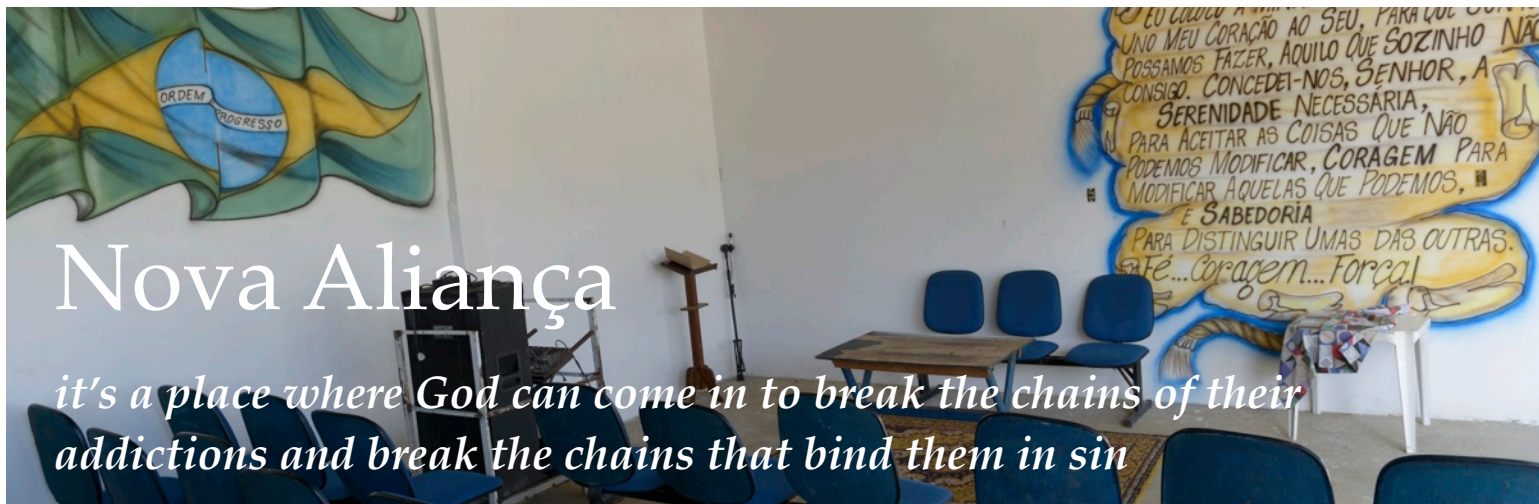
Our next stop is a favela called Beira Do Rio. Fresh air and a road that dead-ends at the river make this slum seem less filthy somehow. They've never seen us here before and they watch a bit before stepping up to the truck. Then the kids are grabbing garrafas, empty soda bottles, for us to fill up. They sit in the dirt in front of a house and swallow down their lunch. Mark walks up the stone street between the

two rows of houses handing out bibles. In one home, an old woman takes the Word and raises hand and eyes to thank God for visiting this place.

The food, that is secondary. That helped us to build trust. That led us to this place now where we can come into slums that most people don't know exist, don't care to know. And perhaps we would never have imagined coming into these places, but His ways are not our ways and we thank Him for that.

The boxes of bibles are empty. Spread out, filling hands that have never heard.





Nova Aliança

it's a place where God can come in to break the chains of their addictions and break the chains that bind them in sin

Murillo's Story

Murillo asked to be locked in the church. Thirty days. A desperate crack addict, he knew he needed help and his mother's priest said nothing could be done. But Pastor Solomon agreed to try.

"He said, 'I know nothing about drugs, but I'll help you. I can lock you up, and I'll try to find out everything I can to help you,'" Murillo says, remembering. Knowing it was his best chance of getting clean, Murillo agreed. One month later, he was ready to leave, ready to pursue a new dream of opening a rehab center for men just as broken and bound by addictions.

During his stay at the church he heard God's call on his life. "I was resistant to the Word at first. In the middle of treatment someone was preaching and it was love that they showed me. I felt this love and I felt like I had a bigger family by my side that was always worried about me. I thank God for the brothers and sisters who were there."

He realized his testimony could be used to help others battling the same problems. "I was sweating and shaking and I started dreaming. I started to dream and write down my dreams and you're sitting in my dream now," he says, pointing at the walls of his office at the Nova Aliança Rehab Center.

Murillo's new rehab center is down the road from his original location. He built up a beautiful facility on rented land, but when the man who owned the property decided he wanted Murillo off, the guys packed up what they could and started over in a new place.

The new spot is beautiful, an old farm with a sprawling view of green fields and cattle grazing behind what now serves as the main office building. "I looked for a place that would be comfortable and

pleasant because you have to have something that replaces the drug," Murillo says.

Before opening his own, he visited different rehab centers, taking notes of things he saw, what worked, what he wanted to recreate. "I went to bible study,

animals, cooking, cleaning, laundry. They rest at eleven, followed by lunch at noon. After a midday nap, the 1:45 wake-up horn sounds and they have bible study from two to three or four.

"Many of the guys here are from Christian families,"



took Christian life courses and as many bible study courses as I could. This, what we have here," he says speaking of Nova Aliança, "it's a missionary project."

In the eight years since he's been running the rehab, over 4,000 men have come. Of those 4,000, one to two hundred are clean at max. "Only the ones that truly submit to the process succeed. The ones that last are the ones that truly got to know God."

Currently, there are about 70 guys in the program. They eat, sleep, work, and study the Word of God. They wake up at 5:45 and have devotional time until 6:30. From eight to eleven they do whatever work they have been assigned, taking care of

Murillo says. "They grow up and are curious and they think they want to experience something...like the prodigal son. I remember him when I see these kids. They are at the point of eating pig's food and they want to come back. Thank God He goes after them."

Murillo used drugs for fifteen years. He started with drinking and soon experimented with inhalants. "I had sniffed Lolo (a strong inhalant) and the next step was easy, so I tried it. I never thought it would trap me." That thinking traps so many of these guys that find themselves at Nova Aliança. They cannot fix themselves. "I'm the proof of that," Murillo says, "I had tried before."



Only 200 hundred of 4,000 are clean today. Murillo has seen them fall. "I suffered so much when I saw these guys go back. But I understand that what I'm called to do is to go and preach the gospel. Sometimes they confess, but God is the one who saves. We suffer because we believe in certain people but then it's wasted, the world suffocates the Word. The bible says who is born of God overcomes the world."

Murillo gives a tour of the center, points out the work being done on the kitchen, the fields they've rented to people who want to graze cattle, the new rubber floor mats that were donated for the outdoor gym. He talks about his plans to clean up the pond down the hill to raise fish to help feed the guys. They're working on a place upstairs in the office building for a doctor. All of these projects, all of these drug addicts needing support, and yet Murillo knows he isn't doing this alone. "God meets our needs. I never feel like I need to turn anyone away because of funds. Sometimes they arrive with only the clothes on their body. The just will live by faith. Without faith it's impossible to please God, so we have to rest in Him. It makes Him happy."

The work here is never done. "It's a constant battle with the enemy, Murillo says, we need spiritual courage. Pray that He saves and brings light and strength. The prayer of a righteous man availeth much, how much more will the prayer of many. I have no doubt that I'm on my feet here because of so many people praying for this work."

Outside the office the guys gather for bible study, taking their places on the donated blue airport benches. It's warm and sunny, but they rub away grog from their naps and open their bibles. Murillo is off to run another errand, his phone ringing again as he waves goodbye.

Nova Aliança, this rehab center Murillo dreamed and started, it's a refuge. "It's by grace," Murillo says, "It doesn't come from me. I don't want to glory in it." It's a place for street kids, men broken and bound, it's a place where God can come in to break the chains of their addictions and break the chains that bind them in sin. For by grace.

One of the best ways to keep their mind off addictions is to keep these guys busy. That's easy enough considering Murillo just moved to this new location and there's plenty of work to do. One of the



guys, Luciano, is an alcoholic. But before that he was a mason. Now, one of his primary jobs at the rehab is to renovate the kitchen. One half of it, the food prep area, is pretty well finished. In accordance with the Board of Health regulations, white ceramic tiles cover the floors and six feet up the walls. It's spotless, washed clean after every meal. On the other side of the wall, the unfinished half of the kitchen still needs work. The floor, crushed up pieces of cement and broken tile, will need to be leveled, cement poured, and then tiled.

By our next visit, less than a week later, the floor is already level and cemented. Unlike most places in this part of Brazil, Murillo doesn't waste time getting things accomplished. Things are organized,

scheduled, and when something needs doing, it gets done.

Outside the kitchen area, the guys show us their soap-making room. Bottles of green, purple, and white disinfectant soaps are stacked in neat rows, filling plastic crates ready for sale. They recycle two-liter soda bottles, scrubbing and washing them outside and then organizing them to be filled inside. There are two cement washing sinks filled with bottles caps ready for use. The guys are eager to show us their finished product. They smell fresh, clean, lavender, citrus.



Ricardo is one of the guys who takes the soaps to sell in the city. The two-liter bottles sell for five reais (about \$2.50). They go door to door in the mornings, and then sell at the street lights in the afternoons. The guys responsible for producing and selling the soap, like Ricardo, get a cut of the profits to save for when they are ready to leave the rehab. Jobs like these give them a sense of purpose. Saving money helps them prepare for the future. And as they work together to provide for the rehab, and to work to make it more functional, they take pride in their responsibilities.

The Long Journey

One of our favorite things about visiting the rehab is seeing the guys we've brought that are doing well. Ricardo and Mario are already here, and on our way to visit, we pick up two more guys who have asked to come. We stop by the police check point near Mosquito to pick up Rafael.

He promised to meet us here at 10:00 am and we see him, waiting, ready to go. He gets in the car with nothing, no bags, no clothes, nothing. Just the clothes he's wearing, dirty and worn. He's twenty-four years old. He's asked to come before, but never followed through. "It was in my mind a long time," he tells us, "I gave up. My heart is filled with the desire to change. I know God has something different, something better. If God frees me from this maybe I can help other people."

He's quiet unless we ask questions, staring out the window as we drive down the road, headed to where Francisco is waiting to be picked up. We ask him how long, when he first tried drugs. "I was



seventeen-years-old the first time I tried crack," he says. "I started with cigarettes, then marijuana with friends. I was living with an aunt who took care of me for a while. My mother died and I never met my father."

The air outside is hot. The air conditioning is cranked in the Tracker, a cool and bumpy ride to meet Francisco. Rafael keeps talking, telling us his story.

"I tried it once. Then two or three years later I became really hooked on it. I started going out with friends after being in the army for a year. I was also drinking with my friends and the drugs make you want to drink to slow you down a bit."

Rafael looks out the window, still thinking but not saying anything. His fears. What scares him about rehab? "I have no one. I have no one there for me. My biggest fear is that I'll go and there will be no one there to visit me, no one on my side. I want to get back to a normal life. It's been fifteen days since I've used. I was already thinking, thinking thinking, and praying. I was praying when you came to Mosquito [with the sandwiches and juice] that day. I was there by coincidence. I don't live there. I'd been living down by the river." He thinks about "coincidence" and God's timing and Clessio. He was good friends with Clessio. Clessio who got off the streets, was saved and radically changed for God. Clessio who got out of rehab, dug deep into the Word and shared the gospel with his street friends. Clessio who found a job, kept preaching and sharing Christ with his family until he was shot and killed by desperate addicts in search of drugs. Rafael thinks about Clessio.

We pick Francisco up near Ponta Negra. He's twenty-six and this is his fourth time going to rehab. Why is this time different? "I have a five-year-old

son," he tells us, "and my mom is getting older now. This time I need to think more about the future and really search for God. I need to be there for my mom and my son. I want to be seen as a dignified person. So much time has gone by."

Francisco is chattier. He's done this before. It's a tough transition from the streets to the rehab center. "You have a lot of freedom on the street," he says. "That's why nobody can count on us. You can't trust us because we're too busy with what we're doing. When we go to the rehab we really do want to be there, but then we start to feel boxed in." He's been doing drugs since he was twelve. "I started using crack when I was fourteen. I was smoking marijuana for two years before that, but then my

uncle gave me crack." We're on our way to the rehab now. We'll make one more stop for some supplies for the guys. We're still asking Francisco questions. When did he realize he was an addict? "You only realize it at the end. You feel like you're the one who can control it and stop. You think, 'whenever I want, I can stop. This is not in control of me. I smoke when I want.' I was thinking I'm in charge of myself and they [my friends that left me] just let it take over them."

During a prison sentence that Francisco served for robbery, he cleaned up a bit and was doing alright. He never stopped smoking marijuana, but he was able to stop using crack for two months. "So many kids really, really, honestly want to stop, but they can't. Friends and family and everyone stays away from you and you still can't."

We pull up at a mercandino (little market) near the rehab center. We grab a few baskets to fill with stuff the guys will need: soap, deodorant, cookies, bags of sugar, toothbrushes, toothpaste, bars of laundry soap, crackers, shampoo, shaving supplies, and chips. Lots of munchies and sweets to help curb their cravings.

Rafael stands watching while we sort the items into seven separate bags: Rafael, Francisco, Mario, Ricardo, Luciano, and two extra just in case. He's standing in the middle of the store, a bit lost, hand on his mouth, smiling when we catch his eye. He fidgets, smiles, shifts his feet. No one there for me. No one to visit. This is his family, right here, in the store, buying supplies to hold him over for the first two weeks until they can next visit. This is the family that tells him, "If you don't fix your eyes on Jesus Christ and stay at the foot of the cross you don't have a chance. Seek Him with all the force of your will and don't let Him go. Fix your eyes on the future. The road is narrow."





Trusting in the Great Physician

For a year and a half Chico's been waiting for an appointment. His stomach and intestines hang in bags outside his body from a surgery doctors never finished. Finally the doctor called. November 25th, 7 am.

Chico and his family live in Aningas. During the wait for an appointment, they've come to trust Mark and Lori. They know that these people want to help and they will not just walk away. The day Lori comes to visit, Chico is standing on the porch. He waves, smiles, hugs her. They stand in the doorway of his home and talk.

The house is spotless, Chico's wife a dedicated housekeeper. She stands next to him smiling, clinging to the good news. Lori told them on the phone: November 25th, 7 am! But they didn't understand her and so she gets to tell them in person and it's even better.

A year and a half later and 52 trips to the doctor later, one of the best surgeons, heard Chico's story. He was sad and then angry. He will operate on Chico so he can get back to living a healthy life.

That was at the end of November. Now, a month later, Chico is doing great. He came through the operation successfully and is looking forward to working like he used to. Sitting around, taking it easy was never this man's preference. Sitting, waiting, being dependent and weak- that was so hard. But in the process of waiting, and coming to Mark and Lori for help, yet another family in Aningas has opened the door to them and has heard the gospel.



Seeing again!

"O meu filho!" Lori says, walking up the painted steps of Cícero's home. His wrinkled face beams and he reaches down to wrap his arms around her. He could be her grandfather but he calls her mama. A little measure of his appreciation for how she was able to help him with his vision problems.

Cícero eyes were clouded with glaucoma. Unable to get to a doctor, or to even know where to find the right doctor for his eyes, this older man was resigned to living with blindness. But a trip to the eye doctor and he was diagnosed, treated, and now he can see again.

His wife comes out to meet Lori on the porch. She points to a bucket filled with cashew fruit and pats it. "This is for you," she is saying. "We want you to take it." At this point Lori's tracker smells like a fruit stand loaded with bananas from some of the kids, freshly chopped coconuts to freeze for coconut milk from Chico, and now a bucket of Cashew fruit from Cícero and his wife. She thanks them, gives them both a squeeze, and says goodbye. Cícero's wife is next in line for eye surgery. Her eyes are just as clouded with glaucoma. But, Lord willing, she'll be treated soon too.

The biggest help to me..

Mario was eleven when he first tried drugs. Now, at twenty-years-old, he's living at the Nova Aliança Rehab Center where he's fighting his addictions and struggling to get clean.

It started with friends. Drinking, then smoking, then mixing marijuana with crack. He didn't have to go out looking for it. Drug abuse is everywhere in Aningas. An eleven-year-old boy is offered crack. His friends are doing it. Why not try it, see what it's like? Murillo, the man who runs the rehab center, speaks highly of Mario, says he's a great kid, and wants to help him get his front teeth fixed.

If you could tell one thing to the kids back home in Aningas who are considering drugs what would you say? "It won't do good for anybody. Don't even start."

For whatever reason, drugs in Aningas are only a problem among the men. They are brought in from Natal and sold by a few key dealers throughout the small village.

As Mario thinks about his future, about someday leaving the rehab center, his biggest fear is about finding work. Trabalho. Something to do with his hands, something to keep him occupied, something to build a new life with. He wants to be a mason's apprentice.

Mario is one of the few in the rehab who has a support system back home.

How important is your family back in Anginas to you in your rehab process? Muito importante. Very important.

Mario's mother and grandmother live right next door to Chico. When they were struggling to help Mario fight his addictions, Chico's family told them to ask Mark and Lori. Mario then came to them, asking to be brought to the rehab center. This twenty-year-old young man has a lot of work ahead of him. It won't be easy. But he's relying on God.

What's the biggest help to you here? Senhor, Deus. The Lord, God.

Helpers in the Work

We'd like you to meet the girls. You may have heard about them on our website, maybe seen a picture or two, but we wanted to put faces with names and tell you a bit more about what a gift they are to us. The four girls, Layane, Rita, Nadine and Natalia, all live in Aningas.

Rita: "I had heard of these places in Natal but I didn't know it was a reality. When I first saw the favelas, it was very sad. It touched my heart. I wanted to help them."

Natalia: "I can't throw away food anymore. This work has completely changed my life, my family.... I have a Bible- the best gift I've ever received - this changed my life."

Layane: "I think so. Since we helped the first time, I don't want to stop. Not to help me, but to help these people. It's such a good work."

Natalia: "Helping in this work is so neat; you go to sleep with a feeling that you were able to help a person in some small way. I can't explain it in words. Of course I want to continue doing this now."



Natalia



Layane



Rita



Nadine

They took an interest in the work early on, and have come faithfully to the gospel meetings in the galpão every Sunday since we started. Now they are an integral part of the Sunday night effort, singing along with the songs, engaging in the questions and answers asked during lessons, and helping Caroline keep track of all the kids who have memorized and can recite their verses for a prize each week.

The real blessing has been in the interest they have taken in the work outside of Aningas. On days that we bring sandwiches and juice to the favelas, the girls take on the task of slicing, stuffing, and packing the sandwiches in one of the fastest, most efficient (and giggliest) assembly line productions we've seen. They come with us into the slums, hand out the sandwiches, talk to the kids, fill juice cups, and hand out gospel tracts. On days that we bring the first aid, they know just where the antibacterial creams are in the kit, what bandages to grab, and what the people need for scrapes, headaches, infections, and bichos-de-pé. They are four extra pairs of hands that are willing and eager to help.

Each of them has professed faith in Christ and it's evident that He is using this time when they can be a help to us to open their eyes to all the ways that they can be useful to Him. We had them talk a bit about their experiences while working with us. Here's a little peek into what they think of all this:

Nadine: "Before, we thought that we had nothing... but now, we know that we have everything."

Layane: "The people know that we aren't just coming with food. We come with love and respect them, and for that, they accept us. I was moved. I never imagined that people were living in these conditions. I had a desire to help because I couldn't give anything to them myself, but with this work, I could help them."

Do you want to continue doing this kind of work? How, and what might you do in your life in the future?

Nadine: "I want to be in a profession where I can help people."

Rita: "I want to continue helping them in this work. It's very gratifying to see the faces of the people light up when we arrive to help them."

Jaise

Jaise is quiet and guarded. When Liane starts talking a mile a minute and Natalia starts talking over her and Rita and Nadine are laughing, Jaise hangs back a bit. It takes her a little longer to relax, get comfortable, laugh a bit herself.

Jaise has lupus. The doctors told her she had the disease and sent her home, hopeless, and with no real knowledge about what she was facing. She lost her appetite, her weight, and cut her thinning hair. Her increased sensitivity to sunlight made it easier for her to hide at home. In May Stephanie and Katie were able to visit her, find out a little more about what was going on.

Jaise knew of Mark and Lori, but didn't know them very well. When Lori first offered to take her to see a doctor, Jaise's family refused, afraid that Lori would give her false hope and then forget about her, or worse, pack and up and head home to the United States. Now, nearly seven months later, the family has learned to trust them and allowed Lori to take Jaise to see a specialist.

In early November, Jaise came to the house with the other girls for the first time. She laughed, sang, and painted a green vine with budding flowers up the edge of a wooden text frame for the galpão. That Sunday night she came out to the gospel meeting for the first time. and since has professed faith in Christ.

