



Cutting-edge missionaries in 1910? by Braulia Ribeiro



Even though these two guys don't look like stylish missionaries, if they were alive today, they would be on the cutting edge of missions, doing exactly what they did almost one hundred years ago.

They both lived in Chicago, were both from Swedish descent, were both very very Pentecostal. They had been in Azusa Street to experience the revival in 1906. They were walking in the pure fire of the Spirit and were willing to be called by God for a great job. And of course, God did take the opportunity and called them. One day in a revival meeting they heard a strange name in a prophecy. Both of them heard it. The name was "Belém do Pará." They researched and discovered a city called Belém in the east part of the Amazon Region, right at the mouth of the huge Amazon river.

"Okay! That looks like a challenge," they said with their Swedish accents. They went to New York, the port from where the ship left for Brazil. They, of course, like some of today's missionaries had no money, but were there by faith that God would supply their needs, since He was calling them. The ship was leaving in the next day. They went to walk around the city when they saw a brother in Christ who knew them from Chicago.

"Hi guys! I woke up this morning and God spoke to me that I had to give you some money! I put the money in an envelope and was just going to the Post Office to mail it to Chicago for you!!"

How much do you think it was? It was the exact amount they needed for the trip. Exactly. And there they went, our daring missionaries to the Amazon. What were they going to do there? Well, I think only God knew it.

On November 19th of the year 1910, under a sun of 100 degrees F. and a humidity over 85% they finally landed at the city of Belém. In a few days they had learned to eat fish and farinha and found a

cheap hotel to live in. In spite of not speaking the language well, they prayed for people and distributed tracks in Portuguese from the first day of their arrival. They started going to a Baptist church in town, and after a two years they had to leave, due to the fact that the Baptist leaders did not accept the Pentecostal way they prayed and did ministry.

They continued to be faithful servants in the place they were called to, regardless of the poverty, the horrible tropical diseases, and the idolatry all around. Besides all that there was a hoax going on the region that there was a herb discovered in the city of Belém that was effective to heal Leprosy. So the lepers from all over the Amazon Region, and there are many of them till this day, immigrated to Belém, hoping to be healed. Imagine that. Our two guys in the middle of all this. Do you think that Belém looked poor and needy in their eyes? Do the people looked strange, and maybe ignorant to them?

Of course they did. But that little “detail” did not stop them from believing these people were capable of accomplishing God’s plan for their lives. These "poor-beggars-brown-looking-semi-Indian-ignorant" people were for Daniel Berg and Gunnar Vingren the potential leaders of the greatest Pentecostal movement of Latin America. And that was how they started. Delegating, empowering, sharing, being vulnerable, partnering with the Brazilians.

After two years of ministry, they already had leaders trained in church planting, going to other cities filled up with the power of God and a passion for the lost souls.

How did they train their people? Have they written huge theoretical books about it, so we can learn also how to disciple cross-culturally? No, that was not their strategy. There is no huge secret in training. Everything that involves people and involves God in this earth is about two things: relationship and love. To empower is to love people the way God loves. Love trusts. God trusts us. There is no big training necessary to first start talking to Him, and then listen to His voice. He is just there. People from other cultures can see Him, experience Him, feel Him as much as we can. Our role is just to allow God to do His business.

The Assembleias de Deus (Assembly of God), denomination found by Daniel Berg and Gunnar Vingren became and still is the largest denomination in Brazil, totally indigenous in its forms of worship, leadership, and evangelism.

Braulia and her husband, Reinaldo, lead YWAM's ministry in the Amazon region of Brazil.