

NEXUS

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Ordinary people can make an
extraordinary difference

— ZEZE, MARIA JOSE DA SILVA, A BRAZILIAN LEADER —

~ By George Bunz ~

Zeze has been a leader and supporter of ROHFC programs in the state of Alagoas in Brazil for many years. George Bunz, former ROHFC president, recently interviewed her so ROHFC supporters can get to know her and appreciate her.



Maria Jose da Silva, but she is known as Zeze.

George: I first met Zeze in January, 1999. Alphonse Gerwing had invited a team from Wainwright to join him on a visit to ROHFC projects in Alagoas, Brazil, encouraging us to become involved in the NGO. I tagged along to a meeting with Zeze, Al, and David Oke, a project manager at CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) to plan the new Women's Capacitation Project. It was at Inhapi, in the heart of the Sertao, the big desert. Al introduced this woman leader to me as, "Maria Jose da Silva, but she is known by everyone as Zeze." It is the name she prefers.

Even at this first meeting, I noticed the intensity of this remarkable woman leader and

her passion for the cause of social justice for the women of Brazil, especially rural Alagoas. Zeze has provided leadership in all of ROHFC's women projects in Brazil since then, exhibiting wisdom, commitment, bravery, and stewardship. Thank you, Zeze, for opening your heart to us:

George: Zeze, please tell us a little about your childhood, your home and the community that you grew up in.

Zeze: My childhood was of extreme poverty. My family lived on fishermen's street. When I turned seven, like my sisters and brothers I had to work to help buy food. My mother sold fish, like cod, that we cleaned, salted, and dried in the sun. The older children spent up to ten hours sitting on the cold floor, spines bent and our legs numb. The younger children put the clean, salted fish out to dry in the sun. When they were dry, we bagged them. Poor as we were, we always had food for our family and for anyone who arrived hungry. I remember when our neighbor passed away, leaving his wife pregnant and with five small children. My mother said that each of us needed to share our food with the children who were orphaned, as we had few plates. I chose Nau; she was only five years old and I was about eight. We ate together on the same plate every day, until her mother got a job sweeping the streets. Nau and I are friends even today. It's been 50 years of friendship.

My mother beat us a lot. She said she was educating us. Today, I understand that she was tormented by the situation of social vulnerability. She and my father worked too hard so that our family wouldn't go hungry. Often there were no chairs or beds for all of us, as we were a family of 12. We all studied, my father insisted on that, but it was not easy to concentrate in class because of extreme tiredness. It is difficult, even today, to concentrate with the pain I have. My brothers and sisters have serious problems with their spine and joints. In addition, I have fibromyalgia,

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like my mother and older sister, who died at just 51 years old. At age 15, I tried to commit suicide because I worried so much about my family and I felt powerless, with nothing I could do. I took a lot of epilepsy pills and was in a coma for six days. The doctors said that it was a miracle that I survived. The financial situation of my family only started to improve after President Lula won the elections, starting in 2003.

Soon after I recovered from the suicide attempt I joined the youth group at the Church of São José, where Father Silvestre was parish priest and Sister Claire and Sister Maria worked. They made us see our social class, uniting faith and reality. When I turned 17, I went to represent my region in the Central Team of the Pastoral de Juventude do Meio Popular (PJMP) — *Youth Ministry of the Popular Environment*— an outreach program of the Catholic Church. I was delighted because I began to have more knowledge of the reason for social inequalities, and how to fight against it. We were still living under military rule, a horrible dictatorship.

George: *When and how did you meet Al Gerwing and how did he help you and the people of Alagoas?*

Zeze: I met Al Gerwing, affectionately called Tomas here in Brazil, in 1992, through friends. Over time we became friends, especially when I started working with a women's organization. Al was very supportive. He had a heart the size of the world. He lived true empathy. He was very concerned about social inequality, and he often traveled through the rural areas of Alagoas, contributing to projects to fight hunger and misery in my state. He became friends with many humble, poor people, including the homeless. Tomas was the brother who sympathized with the oppressed class.



Al (Tomas) Gerwing had "a heart the size of the world."

George: *What organizations and leadership roles have you been involved with? Tell us a little about your work and your successes and achievements.*

Zeze: When I was very young I went to demonstrations that denounced the atrocities of the military regime. The police always attacked us. Unfortunately I had to flee many times to avoid being attacked or arrested. During this period, I participated in the Campaign for Direct Elections in Brazil. I contributed to discussions on the elaboration of the Brazilian Constitution of '88 and against the excesses of the government. When I turned 19, I heard about the Workers' Party (PT in Portuguese) and started my party activism to fight against the oppression of the working class. Since I was a child, I questioned gender inequalities. I wanted to know why men could do everything and we women could not do anything. I soon realized that even in the PT, with its socialist goals, there were limitations for women. So together with two friends I decided to create the *Women's Nucleus of the PT*. We held discussions about gender equality and feminism within the party and beyond. We fought for gender quotas in politics. I worked on projects to organize people in needy communities and taught classes using Paulo Freire's methodology.



Zeze inviting Al Gerwing and George Bunz (2005) into the new MMTR-AL headquarters funded by ROHFC and the Alberta Wild Rose Foundation.

In the 1990s I became friends with people who were part of CEAPA - *Central Association of Settlers and Small Producers of Alagoas* and began working there as a volunteer. The reality of women in rural areas is worse than that of urban women. Al Gerwing suggested I do a project with ROHFC so I drafted a proposal which was approved. This financial support was essential for many women in rural areas to acquire critical awareness and realize all the subjugation that they experienced in their families and in society in general.

Of all the jobs I've done, the longest was with the Rural Women Workers and Fisherwomen, and it makes me very happy, especially when I meet many of the working women who thank me for our achievements. I traveled to the hinterland and the forest area of Alagoas so that the women could describe the meaning of my work in their lives and in their families. I was amazed by their responses. They told me that to this day they have the animals they received through projects that I coordinated and were funded by ROHFC. Knowing that my work can really help improve life in communities is my biggest success.

Zezé is one more product of that "holy time", their phrase about a generation ago when Liberation Theology had captured the imagination of many leaders of the Latin American Church and the promise of galvanizing their society into action was in the air—action toward a society such as Psalm 85 envisions:

Mercy and faithfulness have met; justice and peace shall prevail.

~ Al Gerwing, NEXUS 2005

Collective work is what transforms the world.

To strengthen my long-standing friendships, based on faith and on the fight to eliminate social and political inequality, I created a group of friends called Grupo Amizade, Fé e Política (*Friendship, Faith and Politics*). We meet twice a month to talk about our lives and the social, political and economic context of Brazil. We watch movies, discuss them and see if they have anything to do with the context in which we live. This gives us strength to continue our journeys. They are friendships of more than three decades, all coming from pastorals of the Catholic Church in the 1980s. This has helped me to face the pain of body and soul.

George: *Can you share the new organization you are establishing to support mothers who have lost a child to violence as you have?*

Zeze: Despite a long period of illness, I am creating the *Coletivo Laços de Afetos (Collective of Mothers and Relatives of Fatal Victims of Violence in Alagoas)*. It is a collective where people are traumatized by the pain of losing loved ones in brutal and cowardly ways. Most have developed depression and are closed inside and they don't want to know about opening up to the fight. Everyone who has seen a daughter or a son, a relative or a friend, being murdered knows exactly the suffering that corrodes the soul, leaving it mutilated. I really want to see this collective organized for several reasons. One of them is to fight against the impunity that exists in our country. Only in a few murders do we see the murderers arrested, tried, convicted and paying their sentences. Another reason is that there is a lack of public policies aimed at our reality. We live abandoned to our own fate. When tragedy happens, for the rest of our lives we need psychological, psychiatric and other professionals who help us to live with pain and longing.

I'm tired of seeing so much violence. I want to give visibility to our pain and longing so that we have one more reason to live. I am just a stick that breaks easily. However, collectively we are a resistant bundle, capable of withstanding any destructible force. I've been visiting some of the mothers who lost their children. I'm being a kind of psychologist and social worker, even though I'm not trained in these areas.

However, these mothers need to be heard, as they are closed in their world and in their pain. I know exactly what it is, because I also feel the pain of having lost my very dear son, who was murdered at the age of 16. That was ten years ago,

and I was never the same person again. I developed a lot of physical and mental health problems. I even had to take a leave of absence from my work. But I've been trying to be stronger than the pain and decided to turn my pain into a fight. Despite all the difficulties, I will not give up.

George - You visited Canada April 19 to May 4, 2005 as a guest speaker for the 30th anniversary of Rainbow of Hope for Children Society. Can you please share some thoughts on this experience?

Zeze: This experience was unforgettable, I got to know the people who express solidarity with my people. Through my speeches I was able to talk about my work and give an account of what the MMTRP was doing with the Rainbow of Hope for Children funding. I had thought that only the people who work in Canadian NGOs were supportive, but I found that all Canadian people are supportive and friendly. I will never forget that I was served by the owner of a hotel where I went to give a presentation. This would never happen in Brazil because of the very prominent social inequality. In Brazil, the people are supportive, friendly, and like to serve, but many elites are cruel.

George - Are there any thoughts you'd like to express about your relationship with Rainbow of Hope for Children Society?

Zeze: I have a great affection for Rainbow of Hope for Children. Without your contribution, it would be impossible to develop all the projects over so many years. I have great friends through you that I had the pleasure of making over the years. I am very happy to know that you preserve the image of our dear and late friend, Al Gerwing (Tomas). He will always be an unforgettable friend. My gratitude for everything you have done for my people, especially for Brazilian children and women. ✨

AMBROSINA PROJECT UPDATE

by Connie Gerwing


The Casa Ambrosina project provides workshops to improve gender equality and women's empowerment. ROHFC has funded this project for three years and this year they have a total of 50 participants with 22 young women in 2022. Casa Ambrosina is a kind of "school house," offering courses and advice that contribute to fighting poverty, combating teenage pregnancy, understanding "being a woman" in Brazilian society, and strengthening their employability as they enter the job market. Classes use a combination of theatre, photography, and computers—as well as various types of physical activity—to help girls as young as eight and up to their late teenage years to learn about the position of women in Brazil and how they can develop power within themselves.

While the programs are going well, there have been several big challenges this year. Torrential rains hit the northeast of Brazil in June and July, causing floods and disaster in several states of the country. A large part of Alagoas and some lagoon districts of Maceió were completely flooded. Casa Ambrosina was flooded halfway up the walls. They managed to save most of their possessions by responding early but it was hard work. Two weeks after the flood they were robbed. The

thieves entered by violently ripping the security fence and stole some essential equipment. Searching the whole house, they took computers, microphones, and percussion instruments.

ROHFC president Charles Matt commented on the latest report from Casa Ambrosina "I must commend the faculty and staff leading this project for the work they are doing and the achievements that are coming to all as a result of their efforts. Regardless of how things play out for these young women, they are now involved in activities they probably never dreamed of before. It is truly wonderful to see that the training school is raising the windows of the world for these young women."

This is one of the reasons why being involved in this type of work is so rewarding. It is certainly

providing and honing leadership skills for young women who don't necessarily have a lot of opportunities. We must also give credit to Al Gerwing, who stood by with the people of Maceió to let them know that there is a better life ahead for them. I can see his face now and also see that he wouldn't rest at this stage. He would be trying to figure out how to move forward and do more, for more people." 



MORE PROJECT UPDATES

Nwodua Library, Ghana — With a bake sale and street art sale in Saskatoon, project leaders in Canada, Dr. Jacob Alhassan and Janaya Gerwing, were able to purchase age appropriate books written by African authors to send to the project in Ghana. The community engagement leader in Ghana, Raymond Abdulai, has inspired students from two schools (Nwodua and Mbanayili) to participate in the first initiative, a Mobile Library. The program is currently reaching over 200 students. Raymond provides literature which helps expand reading skills and he also provides extra grammar lessons too. A library building is the second phase of the project and fundraising continues for this.

Ipuli School, Tabora, Tanzania — The two classrooms are well underway. The walls are up and the roof is completed. The finishing work remains. The classrooms will be ready for students in the new school year in January 2023.

CIS Scholarships, El Salvador — This project continues to support students from the island of El Espiritu Santos to attend either high school or university on the mainland. There have been some serious difficulties with the government response to alleged gang activity in the area but many students are persisting. One is graduating with a psychology degree, another as an engineer and another is close to completing a law degree.

MT MORIAH SCHOOL – JAMAICA

~ by Joe Gubbels ~

Jamaica is located in the North West Caribbean and is the third largest island in the Greater Antilles with a population of approximately three million people.

Mount Moriah is a small rural community in the south western section of St. Ann, Jamaica with about 2,000 residents. Many of the services in this community are inadequate and unreliable—water, electricity, internet, roads, and recreation facilities. About 50% of the working age population are unemployed due largely to lack of commercial development.



Mt. Moriah Primary & Infant School was built in 1942 (79 years ago). School enrollment is 269 students aged from 4 to 12 years old. Its mission is to educate the whole child with the social and academic skills needed to

succeed in the changing world. There have been many challenges to providing an optimum learning environment which is safe, healthy, and inclusive.

The school has many needs and we can't do them all at once. We have already raised \$15,000 to repair gaps in the perimeter fence around the school yard to keep the children safe. Then we will work with the school administration to fix the leaking library roof, rid the school of the termite infestation, upgrade the sick bay furnishings and upgrade the sanitary facilities. This will



help reduce absenteeism due to sickness. The staff will work collaboratively with the community to work on these projects which will develop community spirit while upgrading their school. ☞

KINYAMBU POULTRY EDUCATION

In early 2021 the Kinyambu Poultry Education project finally began after several delays mostly caused by the pandemic. The first year was a pilot project with six students who participated with their families and teachers who led the groups in three schools. Each child received 10 young chickens, they helped build housing for them as well as feeding and watering equipment and learned about proper feeding and nurturing of their chickens from an expert. The students and their families attended the education sessions which included learning good business practices as well.

The second year with 12 students is just being completed. Things have gone well with the project although there have been a couple of issues. Family support was very important and generally was a very positive part of the project although there was one family breakdown that occurred which caused some issues with

the project. Sadly, one young girl became ill and died during the project.



There have been a number of constructive outcomes from the project. All families learned and profited from the project. Several noted to Simon Ngumbi, chair of our partner organization in Kenya, that they were paying for school uniforms or other school fees from the money earned through the chickens. One of the goals of the project is community education and so participants have also shared their new knowledge with friends and neighbors. ☞



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

RAINBOW OF HOPE FOR CHILDREN SOCIETY

Annual Report

June 2022

Greetings to All,

Wow, the pendulum has swung! We are so fortunate. It seems as if COVID-19 is subsiding, although it is still tagging a few people here and there. It feels so odd that we can move around and not have to be too overly concerned about wearing masks to protect ourselves from each other.

I would like to report that the Rainbow of Hope for Children Society (ROHFC) has been holding its own and we are gradually shifting back to some of the main work that our Directors do so well. Our efforts at COVID-19 Emergency Relief have been so graciously received and requests for assistance are less now, but may rise again if the call comes for aid. We have been told that this support has been very timely and critical with the provision of basic necessities to our overseas partners. We are listening to our partners to see if they need help. It seems the situation has somewhat levelled off.

In the last fiscal year ROHFC has provided funding for, and management of, ongoing projects in Ghana (3), Brazil (3), Nepal (3), Kenya (3), El Salvador (1), Tanzania (1), and Indonesia (1), with some these projects receiving support from our COVID-19 Emergency Relief Fund. A few have been completed with several new ones developed.

The gross value of these projects is in the \$200,000 range, with more requests for assistance coming forward monthly it seems. Fortunately, many people in Canada believe in the good works done by the ROHFC in Education and Human Development Skills Training, Classroom, Medical Centre and Slum Housing Replacement, as well as support for disenfranchised women in the poorest areas.

We love success stories! The recent NEXUS featured stories about three special people who are giving back to their people and communities after having received assistance from ROHFC projects. Wonderful stories to read and know that the hands of those receiving are in return giving. We express our happiness for their continued success.

We are grateful to our many supporters and to the many Charitable Foundations and Community Organizations for their grants that help us to fulfill our objectives.

I wish to extend a sincere Thank You from the Executive and Board of Directors for your considerate support during the last year. Your support has been generous and timely. Thank You All so very much.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Matt".

Charles Matt, President



*Whenever we do something together,
something good, something beautiful,
everyone changes*

*—all of us change in some way—
and this does us good.*

~ Pope Francis





INSIDE RAINBOW OF HOPE FOR CHILDREN

RAINBOW OF HOPE FOR CHILDREN SOCIETY
Statement of Revenues and Expenditures
Year Ended March 31, 2022

	2022	2021
Revenue		
Donations	\$ 216,512	\$ 260,494
Recovery of administration expenses	12,287	-
Non-profit organization contributions	-	32,874
	228,799	293,368
Transfer (to) deferred revenue	(65,359)	(35,984)
Income after transfers to deferred revenue	163,440	257,384
Expenses		
Operations		
Ghana	54,043	46,735
Nepal	28,940	117,859
Brazil	22,028	11,254
Kenya	17,498	16,883
El Salvador	17,310	44,511
Tanzania	1,207	11,414
Indonesia	1,016	5,086
Jamaica	694	-
Philippines	87	-
Peru	41	2,474
Project Monitoring	-	3,696
	142,864	259,912
General administration		
Accounting fees	4,280	6,326
Supplies	4,171	4,922
Insurance	2,620	2,495
Public engagement and advertising	1,520	5,309
Interest and bank charges	940	644
	13,531	19,696
	156,395	279,608
Excess (deficiency) of revenue over expenses from operations	7,045	(22,224)
Other income (expenses)		
Interest	3,578	3,114
Excess (deficiency) of revenue over expenses for the year	\$ 10,623	\$ (19,110)

The Rainbow of Hope For Children Society (ROHFC) attempts to maintain as low as possible administrative costs. All ROHFC Board members are unpaid volunteers who donate their time and expertise towards these projects.

PROGRAMS OF THE RAINBOW OF HOPE FOR CHILDREN SOCIETY

Your support is requested and appreciated for the following projects:

Program Description	Funding Goals	Program Description	Funding Goals
Nwodua Library, Ghana	\$85,000	PAMBE Health, Nutrition, & Sanitation, Ghana	\$7,500
Ipuli School Classroom Additions, Tanzania	14,000	Kinyambu & Area- Classrooms, Kenya	32,000
Tabora School for the Deaf, Trades Training Equipment, Tanzania	17,000	Eye Health Care, Reducing Avoidable Blindness, Indonesia	11,000
Classrooms and Health Centre Projects, Nepal	20,000	Mt. Moriah School, Jamaica	10,000
School of Family Agriculture, Bahia, Brazil	10,000	CIS Scholarships, El Salvador	30,000
Ambrosina Young Women's Education, Brazil	30,000	Paso Puente Dignified Housing, El Salvador	14,000
Grota da Alegria Education, Brazil	20,000	Fundahmer Women's Training Center, El Salvador	20,000
Emergency Disaster Relief Fund	10,000	Community Hospital, Itasy, Madagascar	15,000

RAINBOW OF HOPE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPPORT OF ALL OUR DONORS, and

- Several Rotary Clubs, the Knights of Columbus, the Edmonton Community Foundation, the Holy Family Columbus Club, and the Al Gerwing Charitable Foundation.
- George and Louise Bunz, Wainwright, AB., who prepared the NEXUS Mail-out.
- The Peter Van Winssen Professional Corporation, Wainwright, Alta. for donating the cost of the NEXUS mail-out.

We thank you for offering a gift to any one of these projects and we are pleased to acknowledge your donation with an income tax deductible receipt. Kindly send your donation to:

Rainbow of Hope for Children Society
P.O. Box 2883
Wainwright, AB T9W 1S7

Registered Charity No: 889160172-RR0001
www.rainbowofhopeforchildren.ca

- **Please make cheques payable to the full name of the organization:**
Rainbow of Hope for Children Society

- When making a donation using a credit card be sure to include the 3-digit security code on the back of your card. That number is required by the credit card companies.

- Donations of securities have a significant tax advantage. To donate shares please contact our Treasurer at rohfc2018@outlook.com or 780-968-3952



This Christmas the gift you give can change the world.



We can now accept donations by e-transfer and we use auto deposit. No passwords required. They can be sent to:

ROHFC Accounting—rohfc2018@outlook.com

You must include your contact info in the e-transfer message box so that we can send you a donation receipt.

Please also include the specific project you wish to support so that we can dedicate these donations towards it.

Questions—Contact Cheryl, 780-968-3952

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NEXUS: Produced and edited by Connie Gerwing and Jan Schmitz in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and Rainbow of Hope's Head Office in Wainwright, Alberta, Canada. The expressed views of the authors are not necessarily the views of the NGO.