

Barbara Mosley de Souza,
Missionary in Brasil (Brazil)

*This is my Song, O God of all the nations,
A song of peace for lands afar and mine,
This is my home, the country where my heart is;
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine.*¹



1. Getting to Know You/Conhecendo Você

Name: Barbara Mosley de Souza/Bárbara Mosley de Souza

Award Year: 1997

Career: Missionary to Brazil/Missionária para Brasil

Color of Hair (now): Grayish-white/cinza para branco

Color of Eyes: Hazel

Siblings: One sister, Sydnie Cornell/Uma irmã só

Birth Order: Oldest/a mais velha

Favorite Subject: Writing, English, philosophy/escrevendo, Ingles, filosofia

Hobbies: Walking, riding a bike, reading, gardening/
Andando, andando de bicicleta, trabalhando no jardim

¹ Words from "This is My Song" by Lloyd Stone. Tune: FINLANDIA. TNCH, #391. Copyright 1985 Julian B. Rush.

Estando sozinha, eu gosto e ainda gosto de: Ler, andando na floresta, e escrevendo histórias das minhas experiências.

When by myself, I enjoyed and still do: Read, walk in the woods and write stories of my experiences.

Amigas: Eu pertencia a um grupo chamado "As Moles". Foi durante a Segunda Guerra mundial e haviam poucos carros na rua e gasolina estava racionada. Nós, não obstante, podíamos conseguir mais cupons de gasolina para que meu pai pudesse chegar ao trabalho. Como minha mãe não dirigia, eu tinha que levá-lo, aí então podia usar o carro.

Nosso carro era um antigo Oldsmobile, então foi assim que nos escolhemos o nome, "as Moles" do nome que demos ao carro, "O Molesmobile". Estávamos em 8 comigo neste grupo, Janice Pierce, Ann Brainard, Tina Minitti, Ellen Harvy, Beatriz (Bee) Braza, Mary Lewis e Marian Malloy.

Friends: I belonged to a group called "The Moles." It was during World War II and there were few cars on the road and gasoline was rationed. Our family, however, was able to get special gas coupons for my father to get to work. Since my mother didn't drive, I had to take my father to work and thus was able to use the car.

Our car was an old Oldsmobile and that is how we got the name "The Moles," from the name we gave to the car, the "Molesmobile." There were eight of us in this group including myself, Janice Pierce, Ann Brainard, Tina Minitti, Ellen Harvy, Beatriz (Bee) Braza, Mary Lewis and Marian Malloy.

Eu admirei: Meu avô por parte da minha mãe, o contador de histórias. Quando ele visitava, minha casa ficou cheia dos meus amigos. Nunca soube se as aventuras que ele contava estavam verdadeiras ou não, mas eram muito divertidas para todos nós. Durante a 2ª Guerra Mundial, ele veio morar conosco pois a companhia onde ele trabalhava, fechou. Ele foi meu amigo e conselheiro por muitos anos.

I admired: My maternal grandfather, the story teller. Whenever he came to visit, the house was full of my friends. I never knew if the stories he told were completely true, but they were entertaining to all of us. He lived with us during World War II because the musical organ company he worked for closed down. He was my friend and advisor for many years.

2. *These are my people.*

Barb² de Souza has spent 38 years living and working in a health education ministry among the less economically privileged in São Paulo (San Paulo) and Rio de Janeiro:

These people have become my friends, my family. My way of life has been adapted to theirs. And I am now, after all these years, beginning to reap the rewards of our health educational program. These are my people. I am part of their lives, and they are part of mine.

Barb told a story that gave immediate direction to her life:

When I first worked in a shantytown in Brasil, a young woman died of a botched abortion shortly after I had been with her. She had used a coat hanger to end her pregnancy, and subsequently, her life.

Hers was a story of abuse. As she lay there bleeding, she said to me, "I have sinned and God is going to send me to hell." What could I say? I assured her, "God knows what is happening and won't send you to hell."

After the woman died, I decided then that I would help other women to have access to sex education, family planning and health care. Empowerment can change a woman's life. It can change her children's lives. It can change her husband's life.³

3. *I didn't want to give her up.*

Barb's faith journey began as a pre-teenager. It was then that she first experienced injustice, prejudice and discrimination as realities. She wrote in "Reflections on My Faith Journey":

My mother, having had radical cancer surgery, employed a black woman to work for us. With her came her daughter who was my age and in the same class in school. I had known her for some time but as one of the few black students in our school, she was not part of my group of friends, so we really

² While Barbara de Souza prefers to be called Barb, there is no name in Portuguese for Barb so she became Barbara again.

³ Barb de Souza's chapter is a compilation of an April 1, 2007 phone conversation with the author, numerous letters home to United Church of Christ Global Ministries and several other autobiographical writings. All material is used with her permission.

did not know each other. But with the employment of her mother in my house, we walked home from school together every day, did our homework together and became fast friends.⁴

The closer the youths became, the more they chummed around at school. Barb's friends noticed and slowly left her out.

Our maid's daughter first commented this to me. She said she was the reason and perhaps we should not walk home together or talk so much in school. Not possible, I thought, and so I decided to ask the girl whom I thought was my best friend. She confirmed what was happening.

Brokenhearted, embarrassed for our maid's daughter, at twelve years of age I had to make a difficult choice. With my parent's help, I was able to do what I felt was right. Our maid's daughter was my companion and practically lived with me. I wanted to be loyal to her because she was a friend.

I didn't want to give her up. I couldn't accept why this bright, companion of mine, whose mother I also loved, could be discriminated against because of her color and social class. But this was in the late 30s, early 40s, before TV and the discussion of integration.

Two painful years of discrimination and rejection followed. Barb's parents took her out of the public school and sent her to a local private school. There she was exposed to even more social-class prejudice.

4. *I began to question the teachings of the church about love and equality, justice for all.*

Barb's family was upper middle class. "I was privileged all the years I can remember," she said. "I belonged to country clubs and for a time went to a private school and later to an Ivy League college. I married my high school sweetheart and lived a normal married life after my husband got out of the army, having been drafted in 1950."

Her family was Episcopalian. Her great-grandfather was an Episcopal priest. Barb had not questioned the theology that she heard in church until the experience that marked her life. Then she began to question the teachings of the church about love and equality, justice for all.

⁴ United Church of Christ Global Ministries. April 21, 2001

"Why," she asked, "did blacks live in a part of the town where I shouldn't go, the poorest part?" Thus began the history that would become the objectives of my future life.

She was angry and disappointed. She went to her pastor and Sunday school teachers for answers and for support.

I was disillusioned by the response but in an all white church in the 40s, these attitudes were to be expected. I expressed my doubts in Confirmation classes but no answer or action justified what had happened. So after being confirmed, I turned away from the church.

From what I had learned of Jesus' teachings and his attitude towards those discriminated against, the rejected and downtrodden, the actions of church and members who professed to be followers of Jesus were hypocritical.

5. At last the church was taking a stand for justice.

When Barb became a parent, she returned to the church for the sake of her three daughters. She had found a pastor with whom she could share her doubts. She became a Sunday school teacher, attended theological courses and taught Confirmation classes.

This was an active church, involved in social justice, concerned with the early period of the racial integration process, and so I felt at last I had found my place. At last, the church was taking a stand for justice.

Through this church, she became involved in the Head Start program of the early 60s and saw first hand what organized discrimination can do to a people and how it can destroy self-esteem, even a culture.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people and the earth so you will work for justice, equity and peace.⁵

⁵ From prayer by Sr. Catherine Pinkerton as quoted by Barb de Souza in "Shanty Town Lives" in Global Ministries Update, March 2008.

6. *This was only the beginning.*

That was only the beginning of her learning. At 37 and with a troubled marriage, she consented to move to Brasil. Her husband had found an executive position in Rio de Janeiro.

"I did not want to go," Barb said. "I was back in school and active in the fight for integration in North Chicago. I was an officer in Planned Parenthood. I was told that I owed it to my children to save my marriage."

In Rio de Janeiro, she wanted to be active in some type of service to the poverty she saw. She was taken to a shantytown where she then worked for the next fourteen years in women's empowerment with the Catholic Church. She used health education as the way for women to gain self-esteem through the knowledge of how their bodies function, telling them that they had a right to this information:

This was the glaring need I saw. With the help and experience of these wonderful women who had so little formal education, I began to think about putting together a health education manual. It would be in popular language and with pictures. The manual could then be used to form multipliers who would "go forth" to teach and empower and liberate other women.



Years later, she would make use of this idea. To answer a request from many of her students, this important training manual was put together with the participation of her students in São Paulo in the choice of material and layout.

However, she had to wait until she came to work with the Institute of Religious Studies (ISER) in Rio de Janeiro to finally have it printed and published. She had left São Paulo in 1993 to come to Rio on an assignment to work with the ISER in the project, Women, Theology and Citizenship. A few years later, that project ended, but Barb continued with ISER in the work of empowerment for women through health education.

In a 2006 newsletter to churches in the United States, she requested support for a second printing of the health education manuals. The 1500 copies printed in 1995 were nearly gone. "This means that almost this many students have been educated and empowered," Barb wrote:

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer so you will reach out your hands to comfort them and change their pain into joy [Pinkerton].

7. I have learned from Agostinho ("Gus").

Within two years of arriving in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1970s, her marriage had dissolved and her former husband left Brasil. Barb stayed. Their daughters, Judy, Carol and Susan, were happy in school. Barb was immersed in her work in the shantytown and in the nursing school.

For some time, she had worked with a man from another shantytown who was a spiritualist. His philosophy and dedication to others impressed her. In spite of his being poor, Agostinho ("Gus") was in constant service to others:

I have learned from Gus much about what poverty can do to one physically, mentally and spiritually -- how it can shape one's beliefs in order to survive. Poverty feeds into a hierarchical system of male dominance, sustaining it in all parts of society, principally the church.

In 1981, Barb and Gus married in River Falls, Wisconsin. In time, this partnership would bring them again to Brasil. During the four years they were in Wisconsin, Barb served as a campus minister, attended seminary in Minnesota, and in 1985 was ordained.



In the clinic free pharmacy where I work most the time with my husband who has just delivered medicines to me. I am checking the list.

8. *Our life experiences determine the theology we can survive with.*

Barb had returned to the United States in 1981 because her mother had urged her to return to "her home." Her father had died the previous year. She decided to return to the States. "I was angry and frustrated with all the poverty and injustice around me in the shantytown where I had worked for so many years. I had gone there to live after my youngest went to the States to college," she said.

In the poorest population in Brasil where the reality of life is cruel, people find it easier to believe that whatever happens is God's will or part of God's plan. Barb's life's experiences had caused her to reject the fatalistic idea that life is controlled first by God, then by the top political rulers, and last of all by the people themselves.

The oppression to women, most of all physical and sexual oppression, was as shocking to her as their ignorance about basic health issues. She saw unjust deaths, women's lack of control over their sexuality. She saw high rates of maternal and infant mortality. She witnessed the unnecessary death of an infant because of the mother's ignorance of basic health facts:

What impressed me more was women's strength that I saw in spite of oppression. I threw away any male, all powerful image of God, especially when I was told by all, even by the police, that one does not interfere in fights between husbands and wives for a woman belonged to her husband.

Her questions had burst out anew as she lived and worked with poverty and other social injustices:

Where is this all powerful God up there who can save from disaster, who if you knock will hear you and if you ask will give to you, who can change things, who can save from disaster?

Why hadn't you heard the agonized prayers of starving mothers as they watched their children die? If you are all powerful, then how, God, can you allow such injustices?

9. *Somehow, my path led me to church again.*

Somehow, my path led me to church again – at age 51 – not believing, but looking for a way to come back to my roots for I really felt out of the American way of life. I had no idea of the feminist theology that was being born. I had not seen any women pastors.

At the United Church of Christ in River Falls, Wisconsin, she found a pastor. "In spite of my doubts," she said, "and in some ways my bitterness, the Reverend Dick Hoblin took me in. He helped me find a job at the university."

He led me to the United Theological Seminary in Minneapolis, but–

*What was I doing in seminary?
Was I looking for the comfort of that "old time"
theology?
Was I searching for a god I could believe in?
Was I searching for an answer to all the injustices I
had experienced?"*

Although she had excellent seminary professors, she often felt that the courses had little to do with the reality of life as she had experienced it. However, there were many courses that left students free to write and question. "And I questioned," she said. She was determined to finish seminary although, she felt she was losing time because "there was action to be done!"

10. *And, wow, did I learn!*

Then, while in seminary, she served for a summer in the Native American community of Black River Falls, WI. There, she was a student pastor at the Winnebago [HOCAK] United Church of Christ. Soon after she arrived, the pastor became ill. She spent the next two months alone but was free to learn.

And, wow, did I learn!

I learned about real spirituality, a communion with nature that marked me until today.

I learned of a beautiful culture where women, though seemingly less powerful, were in reality not. Behind the scenes, they were the strength of a culture.

I also learned about racial prejudice and injustice, and once again I was in the middle fighting it. The injustice was, for me, once again an attempt to destroy a magnificent culture.

11. *I found a kindred questioning spirit.*

While Barb was tempted to stay in Wisconsin, she returned to Brasil soon after seminary graduation and the ordination in 1985 necessary for her calling. Because of her former experience in Brasil, she was invited by the American Friends Service Committee to work with women and empowerment about two hundred sixty miles farther down the coast from Rio de Janeiro in São Paulo. She was with American Friends as a volunteer from December, 1985 to August, 1993.

When she and Gus went home, she would find in São Paulo a long-awaited spiritual ally in Sister Ivone Gebara, the Catholic liberation theologian and author. "I found in her a kindred, questioning spirit," she said. "Here was someone who had the courage to write so well a theology which was very different and challenging to the male church hierarchy."

Eco-feminism, Barb explained, carries an image of humanity in the womb being nurtured and part of a whole system which includes all that exists. This reminded her of the Process Theology course she had studied in seminary.

Male participation, she said, is not denied, not all powerful, but is a co-participation:

We are participants in all that happens to us. We are responsible for our own fates and all that happens around us in the community, the world, the planet. We are God's hands. To accept human error or ourselves as blame is often too much responsibility to accept and so the blame falls on an all powerful male God who is responsible.

My life's experiences, especially in Brasil, seeing the situation of poor women in a very macho society, made it clear to me that discrimination and poverty destroy the self-esteem necessary for the struggle for religious, racial, and socio-economic justice.

All this was part of that first experience as a young girl in my journey towards the practice of my faith in a God of love, a God who desires justice for *all* creation, a God who is part of

all creation (the "Ground of all Being," Paul Tillich)⁶. My mission in life as much as possible has been to practice this faith.

May God bless you with the foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world so you will do things which others say cannot be done [Pinkerton].

12. The Association of Community Health Educators [AECS], 1996

In the next years, Barb set to work practicing her faith in a God of love and justice. She created and coordinated the Community Health Educators Training Course of the Institute for the Study of Religions.

In 1992, Pat Rummer of the United Board of World Ministries (United Church of Christ/Disciples of Christ) visited. She saw the work they were doing in São Paulo. This resulted in Barb's being employed in 1993 as a missionary to continue the work of training health educators and the work with the health pastoral of the Catholic Church. In 2002, she was retired and appointed to continue her work as long term, volunteer mission personnel.

In 1996, when a disaster hit the Rio de Janeiro shantytown where she was giving the health educators training course, she and her students formed a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), the Association of Community Health Educators, and created a shantytown health clinic. Barb is its Director/Coordinator.

In her "Shanty town Lives" letter to Global Ministries,⁷ Barb relives the first eleven years of this health clinic in São Paulo:

In the midst of poverty, we have created an extended family feeling in the form of health workers who . . . [are] dedicated to bettering life where people are accustomed to being

⁶ Paul Tillich. The Courage to Be (The Terry Lecture Series). Yale University Press, 2 Sub edition (July 11, 2000). Other writings by Tillich can be read online at www.religion-online.org.

⁷ April 2, 2007.

<http://www.globalministries.org/lac/missionaries/shanty-town-lives.html>

stepped on, ignored, looked down on, and who are accustomed to violence, impunity, and injustice with little recourse from authorities to solve their problems.

After the flood of February 1996, emergency measures were needed in the shantytown. The students in her Community Health Educators Training Course went to work with the health knowledge they had acquired at that time, including giving hundreds of vaccines against tetanus:

We used the roof of one of the huts for a clinic and doctors friends of mine came to help treat the persons who had contracted diseases due to the flooding. In the process, we found other diseases among the people.

When the immediate damages were over, the community asked if they would continue to be present as the few health services in the area were deficient.

"And so," Barb wrote, "we started a community health education and prevention center on the roof top with the women from this health course and some volunteer doctors and nurses from the area."

With money from bazaars and bake sales, they bought medicines. When support came from churches in the United States, they purchased the first three-room clinic.

On October 19, 1996, the Association of Community Health Educators celebrated the first building of the shantytown health clinic and its legal registration. The community clinic offers preventative health care as well as curative care. It now serves a population of about 15,000 people in Canal do Anil.

"I remember so well this happy day," Barb said. "Our new clinic was small – a tiny reception area, one consultation room, a kitchen and storage area. We had struggled so to reach this point."⁸

They had begun with the students of Barb's course and four volunteer doctors, each for a few hours a week. Three years later in June, 1999, the city health department signed a contract with the Association for a new health program. It was called the Family Health Program, Preventative Medicine through Health Education.

⁸ Global Ministries

13. *AECS Projeto Brasil, 2006*

In 2006, also on October 19, the clinic celebrated its ten-year-old medical ministry anew with the addition of a third building. The clinic now has three buildings. Included within this space is a large room for community gatherings and health team meetings as well as other educational programs.

Another large room in the building houses the new program of art and recreation projects for children as well as professional training for teenagers. Barb said they hope these activities will help to raise self-esteem and avoid adherence to the drug traffic that is so common in shantytowns.

Earlier in a clinic newsletter, Barb had written that the political situation in Rio de Janeiro continued to be chaotic and "the public health system at its worst."⁹

I tell my students an ancient Chinese saying, "When sleeping women awake, mountains will move." I know this to be true in the women I teach and in myself.

I have a reputation among the city health authorities, of being a fighter and a difficult person to deal with for I complain constantly, and in defense of our health workers.¹⁰



She recently had received the good news that the city's public health system would grant their request for a third health team and possibly a fourth. Each team consists of a paid doctor, nurse, nurse's assistant and six health educators; also a social worker and a three-person dental team.

There is a physical therapy team of two physical therapists, and a supervisor. This program is not part of the Family Health Program financed by the city health department. It is supported by the Association of Community Health Educators with donations from American Churches. Barb also helps to coordinate this program.¹¹

⁹ View <http://www.t-diff.com/clinic/newslet/041206.html>

¹⁰ View <http://www.t-diff.com/clinic/newslet/102505.html>

¹¹ In her December 27, 2007, letter home, Barb wrote that the physical therapy program had just been awarded a contract to become a rehabilitation center. See <http://www.globalministries.org/lac/missionaries/the-story-of-marinalva.html>.

An important part of the program is the Health Education Training Program. Beyond learning how to take care of themselves, the women go into the community and help others:

Where knowledge is so scarce, it is critical to teach people to understand in their own terms, ways they can communicate with people of their same level of experience. Education is empowerment. In the midst of corruption and violence, we are bringing hope. We have proved that with unity we can accomplish a lot.



I have witnessed joyfully the self-esteem that the Health Education program instills in the women who took our course. I have watched these women whose lives have been changed, change the lives of others in their families, make radical changes in their communities, become paid teachers, as well as volunteer

health workers in their areas, and become involved in popular movements for the improvement of their areas.

Barb quoted a fourth year medical student who had observed the family health program:

It is incredible how we can live so close to misery and not have the faintest idea what it is really like, and even worse, we think we know all about it . . . those tiny, crowded cubicles, where a wall of unfinished brick was a luxury, children playing in the midst of garbage, between puddles and holes filled with dirty rain water, and rats.

But on the other hand, I met strong women, with enviable determination. Women who are not doctors, the majority of them don't have a full grammar school education, but they have something else – very special – the ability to really take care of people. Each of these women is indispensable to this health program no matter what function she is exercising."¹²

¹² Paul Vargas as quoted by Barb de Souza in *Newsletter*, October 25, 2005.

14. Retirement?

At age 73, Barb had passed on the coordination of the Health Educators' Training Program to a former student, Isabel da Silva. Her former, Barbara-trained teachers have taken over teaching the many health courses. Barb said, "I enjoy watching the process of empowerment."

The day it was suggested to her that she should plan on retiring at the end of her contract, she reflected:

Retire! Why? To change my way of life would be "death" for me. I am alive, willing and dedicated to women's self-esteem and the empowerment process. This life I have made for myself is my reason for being. My life goes on here!¹³

Now, as an appointed volunteer missionary, Barb continues to work a full week at the clinic, write proposals and meet new challenges.

15. So What About You?

- Frederick Buechner said, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." The poet Rumi said, "Let yourself be silently drawn by the stronger pull of what you really love."

Why do you think Barb de Souza was drawn to work among the poorest people in Brasil?

What do you think was most difficult about her work as a missionary?

What do you think was most fulfilling about her work?

- You may feel the pull of a calling. Quiet yourself until you reach that deep, silent place within you. Listen to the persistent pull of what you really love.

What did you identify as a possible life goal? At what point do your deepest gladness and the world's deep hunger meet?

¹³ From "Why I Chose to Stay in Brasil and Not Retire" in a 2004 issue of *The Disciple*.

- There have been times throughout her life that Barb gave up on God when she looked around her at a difficult situation. When she gave up her outgrown ideas of God, she grew both in her understanding of God and in a living faith.

What were some of the times that Barb questioned God and her church? What caused her to question?

Think about a time when you gave up on God. Did God give up on you? What happened?

- Think about how Christ treated less privileged persons and what his actions taught us.

What similarities do you find between how Christ treated people and the medical ministry of Barb de Souza?

16. Church Family Project

1. Invite each person attending your youth group or other gathering to visit the Global Ministries website (www.globalministries.org/lac/) and go to Countries. Select Brasil. Take turns sharing stories by Barb de Souza.

2. Ask your minister to contact your Conference or Region office to learn when the next missionary serving in the Latin America/Caribbean area will be touring in your area. Invite the missionary to visit your church. Ahead of time, study as a group about the country and the mission project. Come with questions.



17. Still Curious?

Photos of the Clinic project. Go to www.aecsprojetoBrasil.com.br.

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ.

<http://www.globalministries.org/lac/countries/Brasil/>.

UCC Global Ministries. Missionary Faith Journeys. April 21, 2001.

<http://www.globalministries.org>

Missionary Letters by Barb de Souza. "Maria's Story." November, 2004. Find at www.ucc.org. Global Ministries: Missionaries: Resources: Brasil: Letter Maria's story.

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Gebara, Ivone. *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. 1999. See www.Half.com books.

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Dallas (Dee) A. Brauning. *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice*, April 2008