

Santos, Joselita Rodrigues dos (1933–2010)

MAGELA DE SOUZA

Magela de Souza, M.A. in religious education (Andrews University), B.A. in theology (Northeast Brasil College), was born in Brazil and has served the Church as professor of religious education, chaplaincy coordinator, and elementary school teacher and principal.

Joselita Rodrigues dos Santos was a Pathfinder and Adventurer Clubs founder and leader, philanthropist, teacher, and social worker in northeast Brazil.¹



Joselita Rodrigues dos Santos.

Photo courtesy of Jean Magno do Ouro.

Early Life and Family

Joselita was born on October 2, 1933, at Flor do Vinhatuco-Pirangú Farm (the town of Itajuípe today), located in the vicinity of Ilhéus city in the state of Bahia, Brazil. She was the fourth of six children born to José Calixto dos Santos and Joana Rodrigues dos Santos, a wealthy family of cocoa farmers in the south Bahia. Joselita's mother enjoyed a great reputation among fellow church members for her hospitality, especially for welcoming and hosting colporteurs and other visitors in her home. The Adventist message reached the family through the conversion of Joselita's grandfather on her mother's side around 1900.

At the age of three, Joselita lost her father who died as a result of a snake bite. This tragedy left her mother, who at the time was expecting a sixth child, with an enormous emotional and financial burden. Due to conflicts with other family members over the inheritance, Joselita's family was deprived of the means to lead a life of comfort. Her mother was forced to raise her six children—four girls and two boys—with a sewing machine, faith, and prayer.

Given the financial difficulties and the absence of Adventist schools in the area, Joselita had to pursue her elementary education in public schools in the city of Ilhéus. Subsequently, she moved to Salvador (the capital of the state of Bahia), where she went to high school, graduating with a specialization in accounting. Although she

became a teacher later, her expertise in accounting helped her get other jobs in public service.

In 1943, at the age of 10, she was baptized in a river between the cities of Ilheus and Itabuna. Joselita began working very young to help her family. Around 1961 she married Jordão Magno do Ouro, an Adventist pastor. A few years later, her husband was called to serve in Campina Grande (in Paraíba State), and there she had her only biological son, who they named Jean Magno do Ouro. Later they adopted a one-week-old baby girl who had been abandoned at her family's door. They named the girl Jeanne Márcia Rodrigues do Ouro.

Service

Her ministry as Pathfinder Club leader began in 1960 at the age of 27 in the city of Salvador. She was inspired by one of her students, a leader of a boy's club in the Catholic church in his neighborhood. She was so amazed at the idea of having a boys' and girls' club that she decided to establish one in her church. As she began seeking the necessary information, she came across an 8-page manual with guidelines for founding a Pathfinder Club that she received from the youth director of her local field (Bahia-Sergipe Mission).

In March 1960, Joselita founded a Pathfinder Club in the city of Salvador. At the time, one administrator sent her husband a letter, advising him not to allow his wife to do such work since "it was not proper for her to be seen doing these kinds of things."² However, another administrator invited her to help him start a Pathfinder Club in his own church.

In 1968 Joselita moved to Recife, Pernambuco State with her husband who had received a call to work in a new field. While living in Recife she established a Pathfinder Club in the Salgadinho Church, and so, in every city where her husband was called to serve, she established a Pathfinder Club. When her husband was transferred to the pastoral district of Mossoró and Areia Branca (state of Rio Grande do Norte) she founded two more clubs that met every Sunday. Every Sunday she would meet with the Areia Branca club in the morning and then she would travel about 50 km to Mossoró to meet with the other club in the afternoon. The two clubs used to participate in some activities and camps together.

From 1971 to 1972 Joselita founded the Campina Grande Pathfinder Club (state of Paraíba). After her husband was called to perform administrative duties, which allowed the family a more settled life, Joselita dedicated herself to helping financially underprivileged young people to attend Adventist boarding schools. At that time, she was working in a government agency and began to raise funds to financially help those students she was sending to school.

Later Life

Joselita never held any paid position in the Adventist Church. Her work was entirely voluntary. She retired from public service in 1982 and, at the time as a single person, she decided to reside in the village of Capoeiruçu, in

the municipality of Cachoeira (Bahia), near the campus of the Adventist Institute of Northeast Brazil (later Northeast Brazil College). In 1983 she founded the Pathfinder Club of the Adventist Institute, and a club in the village of Capoeiruçu.

She was known for her strong leadership capabilities. She invited people to her house, typically for a Friday sunset worship, where she provided some snacks. Parents came with their children and were very appreciative of the treatment and reception. She would then explain there was a club for boys and girls to learn about the Bible and good manners, and where they could enjoy a band, camping, and a choir. She also explained that to be a member of the club the children must be at school. As children joined her club, she took charge of finding donors to sponsor scholarships for them. Every three or six months the children were instructed to send a letter to their sponsors reporting their performance and thanking them for their support.

At one time, more than 120 boys and girls attended her Pathfinder meetings, which were held in her own house every Tuesday and Thursday in the evening and every Sunday morning. She strongly believed in Adventist education and in Pathfinder discipline, which she regarded as the basic tools to succeed in life. She had a favorite poem, which she made the motto of her Pathfinder club: "I shall win, the life is a journey, where to get weak is cowardice."³ She often quoted this poem in meetings and other Pathfinder events.

Her club was named "Garimpeiros do Saber" [lit. Wisdom Miners], which was a reflection of her own passion for wisdom and knowledge. She not only encouraged young people to go to school, but she herself got several college degrees. Not satisfied with holding only a degree in Social Work, accomplished earlier in life, she obtained degrees in administration, education, psycho-pedagogy, and theology. In the first Camporee of the South Brazil Union, after 26 years of experience with Pathfinder clubs, she declared: "I came to the camporee to update myself and see the degree of development of the clubs of Sao Paulo."⁴

Joselita's great passion was her Pathfinder clubs. When one of her donors offered her a brand-new car, she requested it be converted into cash to get scholarships for the boys and girls of her club. In some cases, even after a boy or girl passed the age limit for membership in the club, she continued to give them advice and fund their studies.

The following snapshots give an idea of her lasting influence on young people. In a personal testimony, Eliel dos Santos Leal, a former Pathfinder, stated that he was planning to study administration, but Joselita advised him to pursue a degree in education and later get a specialization in school administration. Her rationale: there are schools everywhere, but there is not a business everywhere. He followed her advice and currently serves as principal of the school at Capeiruçu. Additionally, he has also been a church elder for about ten years.

Abigail Oliveira testified that she was seven years old when she met Joselita. She wanted to participate in the Pathfinder club, but she was underage. Joselita did not wait long and founded an Adventurers club. So, the girl and her brothers not only become adventurers but also received financial help to study in the Adventist school. Eventually, that girl got a biology degree and currently is a teacher in a public school.

Carlos Antonio Menezes Pinto, another former Pathfinder, who attended worship services in her home, was about to drop out of a public school because he was performing badly in math. Joselita told him to work harder and if he succeeded, she promised to get a scholarship for him to study at the Adventist school. He worked hard and Joselita honored her word, as always. Today he is a math teacher.

Tributes and Legacy

In the book *Pathfinder Story*, Joselita is mentioned as a Pathfinder pioneer in northeast Brazil in the 1960's.⁵ In 2005 she received the title of emeritus citizen of the town from the municipal council of Cachoeira (Bahia). During that time Joselita was sponsoring the studies of 52 Pathfinders at Northeast Brazil College. Subsequently, she received another recognition for her services from the municipality of Cachoeira when the public daycare center (with a capacity for 60 children) in the village of Capoeiruçu was named after her.

Joselita died on January 3, 2010, at the age of 76, but the extraordinary fruits of her labor will last for many years to come, and only in heaven will the full impact of her life be known. She helped many vulnerable boys and girls at risk, who she used to call "my little children." Many of them today serve the community and the church as teachers, nurses, administrators, pastors, etc. As Pastor Baraka Muganda, World Youth Director 1995-2010, aptly summarized: "Here was a woman who not only sacrificed her time and finances for her Pathfinders, but also wanted to see these boys and girls prepared for life here on earth and for the kingdom to come. She was indeed a Pathfinder leader giant."⁶

SOURCES

Hancock, John. *The Pathfinder Story* (2004).

Revista Adventista, March 1987.

NOTES

1. In the preparation of this article, the following individuals offered invaluable contributions through interviews and private communications (October-December 2019): Jean Magno do Ouro (Joselita's son), September 16, 2019; Natan Fernandes, October 22, 2019; Fabio Menezes, a former member of Joselita's Pathfinder club, December 9, 2019; Carlos Antonio Menezes Pinto, December 9, 2019; Eliel dos Santos Leal, December 9, 2019; Abigail Oliveira, December 9, 2019; and Nesias Joaquim Santos pastors in the Bahia Conference of the SDA, December 16, 2019. Particularly useful was the information gathered from an interview with Joselita Rodrigues dos Santos on August 3, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6bGmHazMH8>.
2. John Hancock, *The Pathfinder Story* (2004), 21, 22.

3. From the poem “Hey de Vencer” by Apolinario de Sousa. The Portuguese original reads: “Hei de vencer, a vida é uma jornada, onde enfraquecer é covardia.” Full poem available at: <https://www.facebook.com/people/Garimpeiros-Do-Saber/100009521603084>.
 4. *Revista Adventista*, March 1987, 18, 19.
 5. Hancock, 21, 22.
 6. Baraka Muganda, interview by the author, December 22, 2019.
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