

Ferreira, Antônio Zuza (1924–2017)

THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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Antônio Zuza Ferreira

Photo courtesy of Brazilian White Center - UNASP.

Antônio Zuza Ferreira, canvasser, was born in July 10, 1924, in Baixio, countryside of the state of Ceará, Brazil. His parents, Pedro Zuza Alves and Maria Antônia da Conceição, had nineteen children, of whom only fourteen survived the drought. These were difficult times in Ceará – the work in the fields was hard, food was scarce, and education was difficult to access. In addition, Antônio Zuza was a stutterer, which caused serious difficulties in his communication and made his childhood especially unhappy. He worked in the fields from childhood to adulthood; therefore, he did not have the opportunity to study and grew up illiterate.¹

Since he was a child, Zuza dreamed of having a better life, in which he could earn enough to eat well and visit other places. In order to escape hunger and misery, as soon as he turned 24, Zuza went in search of his dreams.

Practically unable to communicate and without any money, he left Ceará with just the clothes on his back, and started a hike to São Paulo, approximately 3000 kilometers away.²

The journey took more than two years, and Zuza didn't know how he was going to eat, sleep, or even if he was going in the right direction. On the way, he asked for shelter and food from the people who crossed his path. When he found an opportunity, he worked in various activities, mainly in the fields, carpeting, and at the edges of the roads carrying bags of cement. He didn't always get a job, so on several occasions he slept in bus stations, squares, in the woods and even ran away from *cangaceiros*³ who wanted to harm him.⁴

Years later, Zuza used to say that, even after all the suffering he went through during his travel to São Paulo enduring cold, hunger and not being understood, he felt gratified for the varied experiences he had, especially for having achieved his goal, which was to find a new reality where he could have a different life.⁵

Upon arriving in the state of São Paulo, Zuza had his first contact with the Adventist Church, where he met a pastor who spoke to him about the love of God. The pastor said one day: "have faith in Jesus, pray, and he will heal you". They prayed together and, at the end of fervent prayer, Zuza was miraculously able to pronounce the words correctly. From that day on he became involved with the Church and began to speak about God's love to many people. For a stutterer who barely spoke any word properly, that had been the greatest miracle of his life.⁶

A while later, Zuza settled in the city of Hortolândia, in the countryside of São Paulo. At the local church he met a man named Jordão Schiavetto, one of the Adventist pioneers in the city of Hortolândia and father of the woman who would become his wife. In 1952 he married Maria Aparecida, and in order to support his family, he began selling denominational books through the church. The couple had three daughters: Leonice, Berenice Cleide and Sueli, in addition to six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.⁷

Zuza worked a total of 57 years as a canvasser, and in this activity, he traveled throughout almost the entire territory of Brazil. During his travels he was able to experience and learn many things, although being illiterate. In addition to selling books, he always served the local church and was known as a man of faith and prayer. Zuza worked until 2009, when at the age of 85 he started to dedicate himself exclusively to the care of his sick wife, who died three years later, after 60 years of marriage.⁸

Antônio Zuza Ferreira is remembered as a man of faith, hardworking who although going through many difficulties, by the grace of God he managed to win in life. Just as that pastor was used by God to heal him, Zuza also allowed himself to be used by God, and through his prayers many people were healed and families were restored. He lived to be 93 years old and died on October 20, 2017. He had a very good memory and knew the name of almost all the avenues and roads on which he walked in his canvassing work, which covers almost all Brazilian states. For him, life had a purpose, and his life story of overcoming serves as an example for people not to give up their goals and have faith in God.⁹



NOTES

1. Leonice Ferreira de Moraes, interviewed by Renato Stencel, Engenheiro Coelho, São Paulo, April 24, 2020.
2. Ibid.
3. A group of violent bandits which operated in Northeast of Brazil until the middle of the XX century, commanded by Virgulino Ferreira da Silva, better known as Lampião.
4. Leonice Ferreira de Moraes, interviewed by Maria Júlia dos Santos Galvani, Engenheiro Coelho, São Paulo, May 20, 2020.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

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