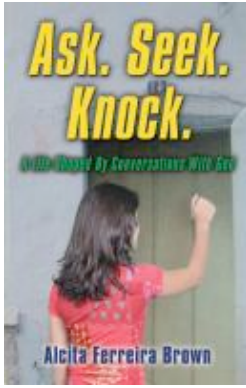


Ask. Seek. Knock.

A Life Shaped By Conversations With God

Alcita Ferreira Brown





To get an education in the hard-scrabbled Brazil of the 1950s was nearly impossible. Alcita's dream was to attend school but she periodically had to accompany her mother and stepfather, a brick maker, to remote places even farther from civilization. Though young, she possessed an internal knowledge that she made use of to attain her goal. Later, she had other seemingly impossible dreams. Again, she employed the same resource. Alcita's story will inspire you.

Ask. Seek. Knock.

A Life Shaped By Conversations With God

Order the complete book from

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/7995.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

Your free excerpt appears below. Enjoy!

Ask. Seek. Knock.

A Life Shaped by Conversations with God

ALCITA J. FERREIRA BROWN

Copyright © 2015 Alcita J. Ferreira Brown

ISBN 978-1-63490-327-1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida, U.S.A.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2015

First Edition

I dedicate this book to:

My husband Thomas Brown,
My adopted family, the Gordons,
My children Donald, David, Tisha, Heather and Lara,
My sister Eunice and my brother Jesuino,
My deceased parents Marcília, Jose and
My already gone siblings.



Brazil

Chapter 1

Cries and moans split the dark silence of the small log house where Minha Santa, a five year old girl, lay sleeping. She rubbed her eyes and rolled over on the straw-filled mattress. Another scream, louder and even more excruciating pierced the darkness. This time, she was really awake. As her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she saw the familiar shapes of the leather-covered chest where the family kept bedding. The round copper headed studs, which secured the leather all around and adorned the lid forming her father's initials, J D F, glittered by the light of the kerosene lamp shining through the doorway to her parents' bedroom. Minha Santa got up, tiptoed to her older sister's bed and, seeing she was also awake, asked, "Neném, why is mother screaming?"

"I don't know. Go back to sleep," Neném snapped.

Sleep? How? Minha Santa wondered. Mother is yelling and crying and Neném wants me to forget about it and go back to sleep?

The square house was divided into four rooms. One served as a living room by day and a bedroom for the boys at night, where they slept in hammocks hung from opposite walls. There was also a kitchen and two bedrooms; one for the girls and the other for the parents. To enter the girls' bedroom, they had to pass through the parents' room. This was a way to keep the girls more protected.

"José, I can't stand these pains any longer. I think I'm going to die." Eunice's mother complained in a scratchy voice.

"Calm down, Guria," Minha Santa heard her father telling her mother, using the endearing nickname he had for her. "Don't waste your strength talking. Just push. The head is crowning. Push as hard as you can. Good girl! Push, push, pushhhh!"

“Aha... we have another beautiful girl. You’re brave, Guria. Rest now.” José carefully held the slippery baby in his hands.

“Rita, dip the scissors in the boiling water. Now, get some cloth from the box in the girls’ room. Fast!”

Rita entered the girl's room and Minha Santa asked, “Auntie, what noise is that? It sounds like a baby crying.”

“It’s a kitty. It’s a kitty meowing,” her aunt answered quickly.

Minha Santa had already guessed what was happening in the other room, she just wanted some attention. She had noticed her mother’s huge tummy. People are just like animals, she had thought. The females get a big belly and then the babies come. She was used to seeing cats, dogs and cows give birth. She had watched her mother sewing baby bonnets and knitting booties. She wanted to ask questions, but didn’t have the courage. She would stop, look and go away. One day, when Neném, was carding cotton, she dared to ask, “Is Mother going to have a baby?”

“Yes,” Neném had replied dryly.

“When?”

“In a few days.”

“Is it going to be a boy or a girl?”

“One can never know.”

“Does it hurt?”

“Don’t be silly! How do you manage to come up with questions like that? Go away. You’re bothering me.”

The excitement in the next room ceased. Minha Santa could hear the owls hooting on the corral fence outside. She looked at rays of moonlight coming through the gaps in the log wall, and listened to water bubbling in the trough by the house. Her eyes grew heavy...

She woke up to her father's voice announcing, "Girls, you have a baby sister. Come see her. She is long and thin like a lizard."

Minha Santa and Neném climbed out of their beds and followed their father. The flickering lamplight cast rippling shadows of her brothers, Joaquim, Davi and Nenenzinho, who were standing at the bedside. The rays reflected on the sweat of her mother's face.

"José, hold the lamp closer so the children can see their little sister better," her mother asked.

"She is a little different from us, mother." Neném remarked. "She has dark hair and her skin is like caramel. She is not the color of milk, like us."

"Yes, now I have two children who take after me: Davi and this one. You and the others take after your father."

"Mother, may I hold her?" Neném asked.

"Yes, but be careful. You're like a tapir – so clumsy."

"Mother, may I take her for Doutor to see?"

"No. Let him sleep. Poor thing, he's only two. In the morning, he'll see her.

Each one of the children took a turn holding their baby sister.

"What is her name going to be?" asked Joaquim.

"How about Agostinha?" José winked at his wife. "We already have Ana." He put his arm around Neném and gave her a playful squeeze, "which is the name of your mother's mother. Now, we can have Agostinha after my mother."

"No, we already have a cousin called Agostinha," Davi said.

"How about *Lagartixa*, then? She is thin and long like a lizard." José bent down and tickled under the sleeping baby's chin.

"José, stop being silly and tell them the name we chose."

“It is Alcita.”

“Alcita! What a strange name!” Nenezinho said with a chuckle. He began to chant and dance around in a circle. “What a strange name!”

“Don’t make fun of our sister’s name!” Davi scolded and grabbed Nenezinho’s arm to stop him. “Father, I don’t know anybody with this name.”

“It is a distant relative of ours. Your mother likes the name. Does everybody like it?”

They nodded their agreement.

Aunt Rita entered the room and asked, “Senor José, are you going to need me anymore?”

“No, Rita,” José answered. “You may go. Try to sleep, because we are going to need you to breast feed Lagartixa for a couple of days until Guria’s milk comes in. I hope it doesn’t take long. We don’t want your own little son to lose weight. Thank you for all your help tonight. Good night, Rita.” He turned to his oldest son and ordered, “Joaquim, walk your aunt home.”

Neném and Minha Santa went back to their beds and Davi and Nenezinho to their hammocks. Nenezinho began singing again, “What a strange name!” He ducked Davi’s punch and climbed into his hammock.

The joyful excitement at the birth of one more child soon ended. José became very sick. He had an incurable disease called schistosomiasis. All of his travels and exposure to dirty water, where the snails that carried this curse lived, finally had caught up with him. His belly started to swell and he had sharp pains in his side. High fever soon confined him to bed.

José lost all hope. The home remedies that Marcília gave him did not help, as he became more and more sick. She and the older children wanted to take him to a doctor, but it was a

five-day trip in an oxcart. She feared he could not survive the bumpy trip – he was too weak.

While Marcília bathed his face with a cloth dipped in water to cool his fever, he muttered and rolled his head from side to side. He opened his eyes and turned his head to look down at Alcita, who was surrounded by pillows in a basket on the floor.

“I pity her. She is not going to remember her father.”

“Don’t say that! We’re going to take you to Rio Verde. You’re going to get treatment and recover.”

“No. It’s no use. I am going to die soon and my Lagartixa is not going to remember me. She is going to call another man father. You’re only thirty-six and pretty. You’ll have a new husband soon. But, I am telling you, when you’re married to that other man, I’m coming back to pull your feet at night.” He grinned weakly.

“Stop this nonsense, José. The fever is making you say crazy things. Be quiet and rest.

José used to give nicknames to almost everyone. Only two of his children, Joaquim and Davi didn’t have nicknames, maybe because they were the oldest. He called Marcília, his wife, Guria (Gal). Ana was Neném (Baby). João became Nenenzinho (Little Baby). Eunice was called Minha Santa (My Saint). Hélio received the title Doutor (Doctor) and, the littlest daughter, Alcita, became Lagartixa (Lizard). But she lost her nickname when, at only five months old, she lost her father.

Chapter 2

Two years after my father died, our mother went to a local dance. A widower called Samuel Ramalho had just come from the neighboring state of Minas Gerais. Sparks flew when he and my mother danced together. Soon they were married. This union formed a family of thirteen. Senhor Samuel brought four of his children: Bejo, Luso, Lola and Lissa. As for my mother, she contributed seven.

We lived on a small farm of forty acres of red, fertile soil, in Cachoeira Alta, *High Falls*, in the south of the state of Goiás. A small farm is known as “chácara.”

There was a canal, which carried water from a spring and served three chácaras. Ours was the first. The canal passed by the front of our yard and a trough linked to the canal brought water to our backyard. This way, we had running water to drink, to use for cooking and laundry and to run our water-driven mortar and pestle for pounding grain. We called this useful machine a *monjolo*. Where the *monjolo* dumped the water, it formed a pool. We took our baths there. We stopped the *monjolo* so we could rinse ourselves with the water that poured directly from the trough – strong and refreshing as a small waterfall. Around the pool, my parents planted yams whose leaves looked like giant fans and served as a wall to give us privacy during our baths. A shed protected part of the *monjolo*, and we stored our grains in that cabin.

My father had planted many fruit trees in our backyard. Though he lived a short life, the fruit trees were a testimony to his efforts to provide for the family. We had oranges, limes, cashews, tangerines, mangoes, avocados, bananas and others. We still had an enormous empty space to plant yucca, corn, okra, squash and sesame seeds.

“This house is too small for thirteen people,” my stepfather said. “Let’s add on some adjacent rooms.” At the side of the old house, Senhor Samuel and the boys constructed three more bedrooms and a living room with brick walls, a tile roof and a cement floor. To pass from the old house to the new rooms, they constructed a short wooden bridge with a cover over it. They took out the wall separating the kitchen and the old living room, to enlarge the kitchen.

Our brick stove had a long platform to hold the ends of the burning firewood. I liked to climb there and crouch to see my sister Neném cooking. We kept our kitchen utensils on open wooden shelves. On the bottom shelf, we had the twenty liter cans containing beef and pork cooked and preserved in lard. On top of the stove there was a board hanging with cords from the ceiling. It was there my mother stored cheese, sausages, *rapadura*, hard sugar bricks, and balls of caramel, covered and tied in husks.

We owned a horse-powered mill to squeeze sugar cane. My mother and older sisters poured the fresh sugar cane juice into a huge copper boiler and cooked it until it became a thick syrup. After that, they poured the hot, golden syrup into a wooden mold consisting of ten rectangular spaces, and let it cool and solidify. When the syrup hardened enough, they carefully pulled out the dividers, leaving behind the bricks of sugar. They were as thick as clay bricks, but longer and wider. As for molasses, my mother separated some of the syrup before it was too thick and stored it in bottles.

During the cold nights in June and July, my brothers brought firewood and lit a fire in the middle of the kitchen floor. Everybody sat around it on benches or stools, to keep themselves warm and tell stories. Though I became scared with the stories of ghosts that my visiting uncles loved to tell, I remember these times as the happiest moments of my

childhood, all my siblings and parents together under the same roof.

I remember one particularly funny story one of my aunts, who was visiting us, told about my father.

“Your father was a kind of entrepreneur and pharmacist. He treated people with home remedies and with medicines bought in drugstores. Once, he left for a trip to Uberaba, the nearest big city, to buy salt. He made the journey with his team of four oxen pulling a two wheeled cart. He filled the cart with bags of salt, covered them with a water proof canvas and began the journey back to Goiás. He went through many villages and cities to sell them. Of course, he had to walk in front of the oxen guiding them, or by their side encouraging them when the road was muddy. One day it started to rain and your father took off all his clothes and hid them under the canvas in order to keep them dry.

People traveled by horse and it was rare to meet other travelers. When you did meet anyone, you had to stop, talk and exchange news. One day your father saw five horse riders approaching. Because it was raining, they were all covered with their canvas cloaks and hats. When they stopped, your father shook hands with them, but one turned his face to the side and avoided looking at your father as the others talked. When they said good-bye and turned their backs to leave, your father noticed that the fifth traveler, the one who had turned his eyes, had long hair tied in a ponytail hanging behind her hat. It was a woman!”

One Sunday, six of us were playing house under a giant mango tree in the pasture. This mango tree was in an area where a log cabin once stood. A Chinese lime tree, a genipa tree and the mango tree were all that remained from the

orchard that had once surrounded the cabin. The majesty and the beauty of that mango tree attracted us as light attracts moths. It was the biggest thing in my world. It took four of us to embrace its trunk. The ends of the lowest branches touched the ground and, with their thousands of subdivisions and leaves, formed a thick, round, green wall. Above these lower branches spread dozens of others that kept subdividing into other limbs to form a leafy labyrinth. The direct light of the sun never reached under the tree no matter if it was the dry or wet season. The humid ground smelled of earth and rotted leaves.

My sisters and stepsisters would work like adults during the week, but on Sundays our mother let them be what they still really were – teenagers and kids. Neném and Lola were fifteen at this time, Lissa thirteen, Minha Santa nine, Doutor six and I, Alcita, was four years old.

My sisters swept the whole area under the tree and piled the dried leaves in one spot. That was the bed. They made seats and shelves with old boards and pieces of wood from the old cabin. They collected limes that were yellow, soft and as big as oranges. They cut them into halves and took out the interior. These half shells were the dishes for the house. They set them neatly on the board shelves.

Neném sat me on one of the thick lower branches where I could lean on the trunk. She told me that it was my cradle and it was time for my nap. Futrica, my dog, lay down, leaned her head on her front paws, and kept looking up at me.

“I’m thirsty,” I said. We had brought two calabash bowls, some brown sugar, a knife and a broom with us. Neném fetched me water from the nearby canal with one of the bowls and gave me some in one of the lime cups. “I’m hungry,” I continued.

“What a nuisance you are!” Neném said and lifted me down.

We went to look for fruits under the genipa tree. There were wild animals that also liked fruit, so we had to be careful not to get one that an animal had bitten or that was spoiled. We found two. As Neném peeled the fruits, their brown, wrinkled peel reminded me of my grandmother’s skin. Neném cut the fruits into small pieces in a calabash bowl and added some sugar. She divided the mixture into six lime peel bowls. Each one of us got a small portion of that delicious mixture – the sweetness of the strong homemade brown sugar and the tartness of the genipa. Yummy! We ate with our fingers and I even put some in Futrica’s mouth. When I finished, I not only licked my fingers, but the little bowl also. Then, Nenenzinho, who was twelve, arrived.

“Our peace is gone,” Lissa lamented.

“Why didn’t you call me to play with you?” He complained.

“Because you are a trouble maker,” Lola replied. “Go away, we don’t want you here.”

“I just came because mother sent me to tell you that lunch is ready.”

“All right,” said Neném. “Let’s go and eat.” Seeing that Nenenzinho was staying behind, she asked, “Aren’t you coming?”

“In a little while; first I want to pick up a genipa fruit for dessert. You ate some and didn’t save any for me,” he answered.

After lunch, we returned to the mango tree. Suddenly Neném clenched her teeth, shook her fists in the air and yelled.

“I’m going to kill him!”

“What happened?” the others asked frightened.

“Nenezinho peed on every one of our lime peel bowls. See for yourselves!” Neném answered in an outraged voice.

They threw all of the bowls away and made new ones. After a while, Nenezinho arrived smiling.

“Let’s beat him up!” shouted Lola.

They chased him around in the pasture, but he was faster than any of them. They gave up and returned, sweating.

Sometime later Nenezinho approached twisting a lock of hair on the right side of his forehead. Everyone knew that he was serious when he did that.

“Peace!” he said. “Let me play with you!”

“Only if you don’t do any more mischief and obey us.” Neném demanded.

“I won’t. I promise to be good.”

“OK, then.”

“But... let’s play catch. It’s too boring to play house,” he said. “I’ll be it. I’ll run after you on the branches of the mango tree or on the ground under it. When I catch someone, that person will be it.”

They all agreed. Neném put me back on my cradle, the fork of a thick branch. I was too little for that game. From my spot, I observed everything. Nenezinho counted to fifty so the others had time to climb the tree and spread out.

“Here I come!” he shouted, and climbed the tree after Neném. She scrambled to the end of her branch, which bent. She hung on and jumped to the ground. He went after Lola and Lissa. They yelled like crazy, each ran to the end of their branch, and succeed in getting to the ground. He climbed down and went after Neném, Lola and Lissa. They climbed up again.

“This is not fair. You are only going after the big people,” Doutor complained. “I want to play, too.”

“Be ready. I’m coming after you!” Nenezinho shouted back.

He started pursuing Doutor, who kept going higher and higher passing from one branch to another until he had no way of escaping. Nenenzinho, a few meters away from him, yelled, “Now, I got you! You have no way out.”

“Oh, no, not yet, I’m going to jump and you are a coward. You don’t have the courage to jump like me.”

“Don’t jump!” my sisters yelled, “You’re going to fall down and die.”

In an act of desperation, Doutor jumped like a monkey to another branch. He grabbed it and was safe. The ones below moaned in relief.

“You aren’t really trying to catch anyone, Nenenzinho. You just want to be it all the time,” Minha Santa also complained.

“Is that so? I’m going to catch you by the hair,” Nenenzinho yelled back.

He went after her. She also got trapped on a high branch. She imitated Doutor and leaped for another one. She reached to grab it but missed. She tumbled down from branch to branch like a ripe mango.

The five of them climbed down in a state of shock and stood crying around Minha Santa who was lying still on the pile of dried leaves. “Mother is going to kill me! I killed my sister! What am I going to do?” Nenenzinho said sobbing.

“Run home,” Neném ordered. “Bring mother, maybe she can do something.”

I knew what “to die” meant. My brothers and sisters always told me that Papai was not my real father. My real father had died, and, Papai was a substitute father.

“I don’t want a substitute sister. I want Minha Santa,” I cried.

“Run, I told you! Run and bring mother!” Neném shouted at Nenenzinho again.

At that moment, Minha Santa gasped, moaned, and rolled onto her side. “Oh, thank God, she is not dead!” gasped Neném. “The pile of dried leaves saved her life.”

They helped Minha Santa to sit up. She was the color of a dried cornhusk. Lola brought her some water from the calabash bowl. Minha Santa drank it and said, “These scratches on my arms and legs hurt.”

We all laughed. We were happy that she was alive and able to complain. We heard our mother whistling for us to come in for a snack – we had seen her start making a rice pudding right after lunch.

Neném got me down from the tree and dried my tears with her skirt. “Don’t tell mother anything about what happened. If she finds out that Minha Santa fell down and almost died, she will never let us play under the mango tree again.” I silently nodded and took her hand as we walked toward the house.



To get an education in the hard-scrabbled Brazil of the 1950s was nearly impossible. Alcita's dream was to attend school but she periodically had to accompany her mother and stepfather, a brick maker, to remote places even farther from civilization. Though young, she possessed an internal knowledge that she made use of to attain her goal. Later, she had other seemingly impossible dreams. Again, she employed the same resource. Alcita's story will inspire you.

Ask. Seek. Knock.

A Life Shaped By Conversations With God

Order the complete book from

[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/7995.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**