

## Racial Autobiography

Growing up in Brasil was one of the biggest blessings in my life. I didn't always understand it this way, but I see it today as an immense privilege to be from where I'm from. How many people can say they're from Guarapuava? From the land of the red dirt! So red in fact, no one owns white shoes or wears white clothing. It gets everywhere. I see my roots as grace of God in my life to teach me and show me that beauty comes from any corner of the world.

IPA, stands for "Igreja Presbiteriana de Arapoti", or Presbyterian church of Arapoti. My father was a pastor in this church for 7 years before coming to the United States. I was 2 years old when we moved there and before that I can't remember much. I remember our yellow home, with a small front yard and a fence. I remember the church with blue tile entrance. I remember the school I attended at church, with so many other kids from church.

Church was always extremely diverse; Brasil is extremely diverse. Different races and cultural backgrounds are present anywhere you go in Brasil. The best way I can explain it is like this; In America, when someone says "oh that's a good ol' American boy", usually what the media has perpetuated is that, that boy looks like blonde hair and blue eyes. But in Brasil that's not the case. When someone says, "Oh that's a Brazilian boy", that boy could look like anyone! And that's where I grew up, in the middle of the most beautiful array of colors never really asking why we look different but seeing that we were.

However, I do remember the first time race became a reality to me. At the school in the church I remember the teacher holding up a picture of all different kinds of people. One from Asia, one from Africa, one from Brasil, one from India, one from the middle east. They were all dressed in traditional clothing; the Brazilian with native headwear. She points to all these people and shows us that people all over the world look different and have different cultures. And as I looked, I realized that people look different. I know that seems so basic, but as a child I never asked why or realized. But in that moment I clicked in my mind; people look different.

Now, with kids nothing is simple. I remember after that moment; I became proud that I was able to know that someone was from a different country. I could tell whether someone was from Asia or Africa just by looking at them; or so I thought.

Fast forward a few weeks, and I find myself in church, playing with one of my little friends. I look at him and a light bulb lights up in my brain. Ding, ding, ding! "He's from Asia!" I said to myself. And feeling like a know-it-all, I asked him: "Are you from Asia?". He looked at me as if he had no idea what I was saying. "Well, are you?" I said. He looks me straight in the eye and says, "I'm from here".

Now everything is jumbled up in my mind. I saw the picture of people with eyes like his wearing beautiful robes and garments exactly like the Samurai movies I had seen. So, was he lying to me? With kids nothing is ever really that simple, is it? And I don't know exactly when, but eventually I learned: People from different places don't look *one* way, they look completely different everywhere. Brazilians look white, brown, and black.

It wouldn't be until I came to the United States however, that I would come to understand that people are not treated the same because of the color of their skin. Arriving in Atlanta, at the age of 8

was a complete culture shock for me. Most kids in Cobb County were white. There was one black kid, one Asian, and one Latino. I was the Latino, and right away I felt unwanted. I would come to class, sit in the corner, and write stories in Portuguese and draw pictures, all day long. I never saw from my classmates, or my teachers, the urge to include me in anything. Almost as if they were plainly saying to me “We can’t communicate, so you got to catch up to us, not us to you”. I remember my teacher being frustrated with me because I didn’t understand, or because I would cry and run away. I grew up feeling like I was the problem, like I was the idiot. And every time I tried to communicate in the only language I knew to speak, I would get scorned. As if me speaking my native language was a direct insult to them as a person.

I learned at a young age that many Americans feel insecure when someone speaks another language around them. As if the only possible reason someone would do that in America is because we want to “talk smack” about the Americans near us. That spoke volumes to me as a child, volumes I couldn’t understand then, but do now. I look back and see myself suppressing my “Brazilianess”, not understanding that my “Brazilianess” is one of the greatest mercies I’ve ever experienced. That my people, and my culture reflect good things. Things that are different, things that may not be understood by an American, but that doesn’t mean they are bad.