

*“What it means to me to live in the United States of America”*

There is one particular date I remember from my childhood, a date that is neither a birthday nor a holiday, but one that I still celebrate every year. The date is June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997—the day I moved to the United States of America from Brazil.

While I was only a naïve eight-year-old, content to be moving close to Mickey Mouse among other attractions, I soon realized that this move would be one of the most important things that would happen in my life. This move would create several opportunities to me that I never would have had back in Brazil.

Not knowing a single word of English the first day of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in an American elementary school, I realized that this was no vacation. Things seemed to get even worse when my parents insisted that I be placed on a standard third grade classroom rather than an ESOL program for students who are learning English as a second language.

*I could never thank my parents enough for that decision. I became virtually fluent in the English language and had quickly made a dozen friends within the first four months of school. I found myself so assimilated into the American culture that I wanted to learn everything about it: from learning how to play kickball, baseball, and football to trying to understand why some math symbols were different from the ones I was accustomed to in Brazil. I wanted to learn why Thanksgiving was so important, and why did we celebrate the Fourth of July.*

*Never had I thought myself to be such an academically curious person, but when I was thrown into a brand new life in an entirely new country, there was so much to learn, and it was this that sparked my lifelong desire to question things and want to learn more.*

Through middle and high school I realized how much potential I had, enrolling in the absolute most advanced classes I could. I challenged myself to perfect my English writing, and

enroll in advanced American History classes. These were big changes for me. I previously shunned these subjects as I had always been a math person.

I became the editor-in-chief of my high school newspaper, something that still shocks both my parents and my teachers, that I was able to *grow so much* as a writer in a relatively short time. This position also taught me great values: how to be an effective leader and how to work with others. It is the real experiences such as this that I have learned from the most in high school.

With a phenomenal organized soccer league in my city, I took on my first job ever as a recreational soccer referee, and today, with four years experience behind me, I am certified my FIFA as a Grade 8 soccer referee.

*The many simple opportunities that living in America gave me are something I will treasure for the rest of my life.* The move here gave me a hunger for knowledge that I will have with me forever. It gave me the opportunity to *grown intellectually*, to learn about different cultures, to understand what it is like to be an immigrant, and it taught me how to have an open mind and a global perspective on social issues. I was given the chance and the resources necessary to explore the several realms of the academic arena, even at a six-week summer program at Cornell University. Such high-caliber academics are virtually unheard among the *members of my family in Brazil.*

This winter I was accepted into Brown University, becoming the first member of my family to be accepted into such renowned world-class Ivy League university. I am very much thankful and I know that nothing of this magnitude could have happened had I stayed in Brazil. America truly has been the “land of opportunity”, a label that I find very accurate to this country.

I have lived in America for almost ten years. I have been a permanent resident for six years. I have lived through the horror of the September 11 attacks, and I have traveled this vast nation, discovering the many riches of Washington, DC, Boston, New York, and the West Coast. I can name every American state and its capital and I still find myself surprised when I

look at a detailed map of Brazil. I think in English, I write in English, I call Coral Springs, FL my home.

As I now move into the final phases of the process to become a naturalized American citizen, I will be finally receiving the honor of *privilege* to wave the Red, White and Blue. I will sing the national anthem loudly and proudly. I will embrace the opportunities that will become available to me through college, and I will travel the world with a crisp, clean, navy blue passport with the words "United States of America" on the cover.

This is what it means to me to live in the United States of America.