

Rocinha: Twenty-nine years of witnessing contrasts

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I remember Rocinha twenty years ago. It was then the largest *favela* (shantytown) in Latin America, but its people had another reason to be proud: despite the power of drug lords and the government's neglect, it was the only *favela* in Rio de Janeiro to develop as a "normal" neighborhood.

The settlers from Brazil's northeastern region who came to live in Rocinha were known to be people who tried to improve their living conditions, even though they were in an unknown territory and had left their families behind.

Although I was born in Rio, both my parents come from the northeast of Brazil, like most friends my age who live here. We were brought up to start working at an early age and generate income as soon as possible. However, I have always wanted to do something in Rocinha, since I believe there are lots of people who want to turn this place into a benchmark for actions designed to improve the life of favela-dwellers. Even before I started college, I already planned to do something big in Rocinha but had no idea of what it could be. It was during my freshman year as a student of journalism that I had the idea to start a community communications class, and FavelaDaRocinha.com was born. After six months online, there were ten people working on the website. They undertook every activity of the mainstream, conventional media – photography, writing, editorial meetings, and contacts with politicians and other important people to produce material. At the beginning, our common goal was to gain experience, a normal thing for undergraduates, and over time these first collaborators used this experience to enter the professional world.

Today, fifteen people work on the website. Since Rocinha's pacification, in November 2011, we have gained international recognition thanks to the live coverage of this operation on Twitter. We also became news ourselves in the media all over Brazil, and also internationally in outlets such as Al-Jazeera and BBC.



Photo 1.



Photo 2. I realized the Project was something big, and my aim is always to go the extra mile. *FavelaDaRocinha.com* fit perfectly as a local media outlet providing news about the *favela*, but how could its repercussion benefit the community as a whole? This question produced a partnership with an NGO called The Muskoka Foundation, who donated money to buy digital cameras. With the help of Columbia student Margaret Day, we started a photography workshop for children in a sports facility called Instituto Reação, owned by Olympic sportsman Flávio Canto. We also started a photography club where people from different *favelas* come to learn photography.



Photo 3.



Photo 4.



Photos 5 and 6.



Photo 7. The Project has no boundaries, and neither have the people of Rocinha. At each step, we realize how curious and eager to learn people from the *favela* really are. I live in a place where more than one hundred thousand people have the potential to shine.

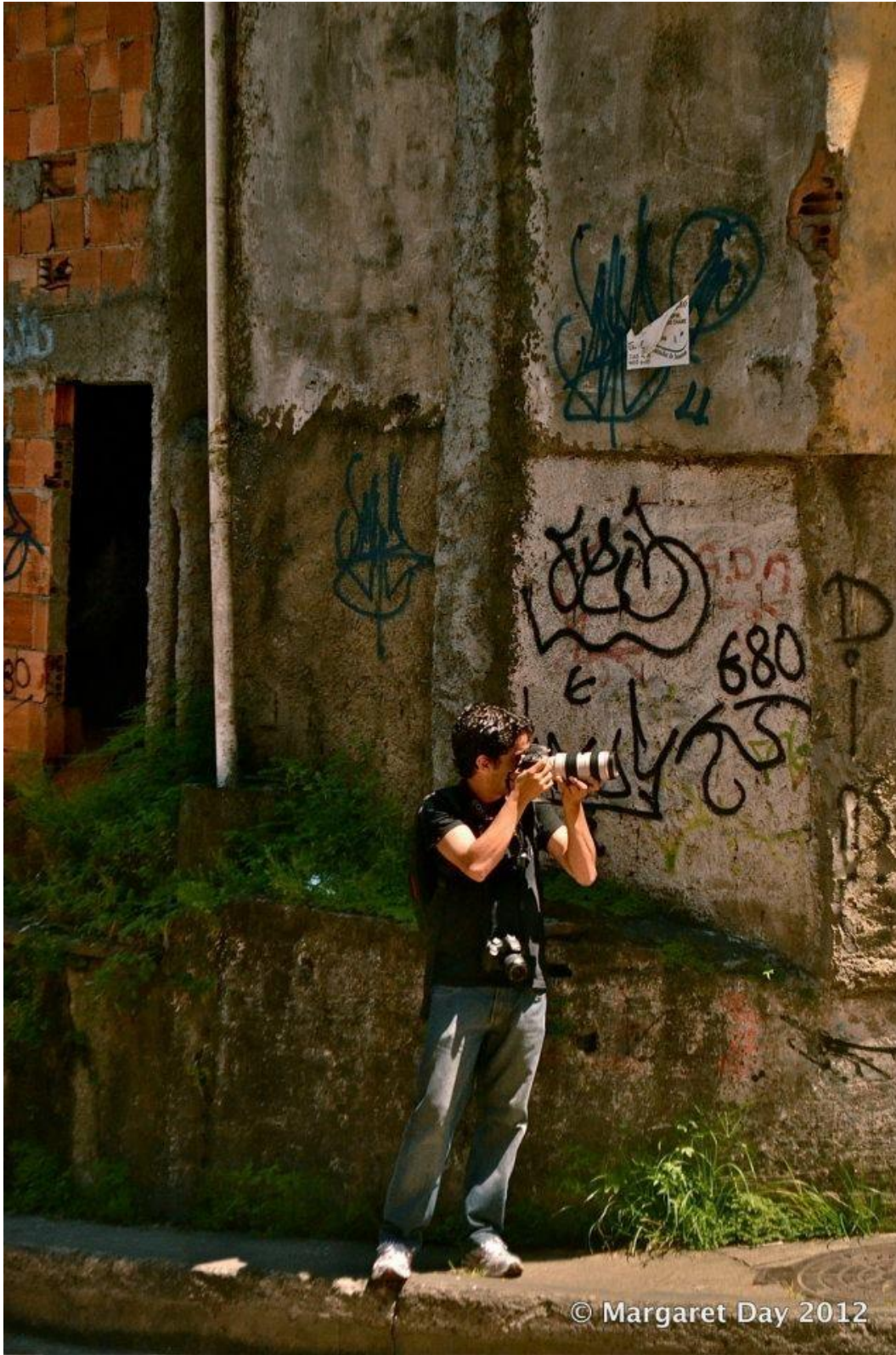


Photo 8.