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Notes from an Un-hyphenated American

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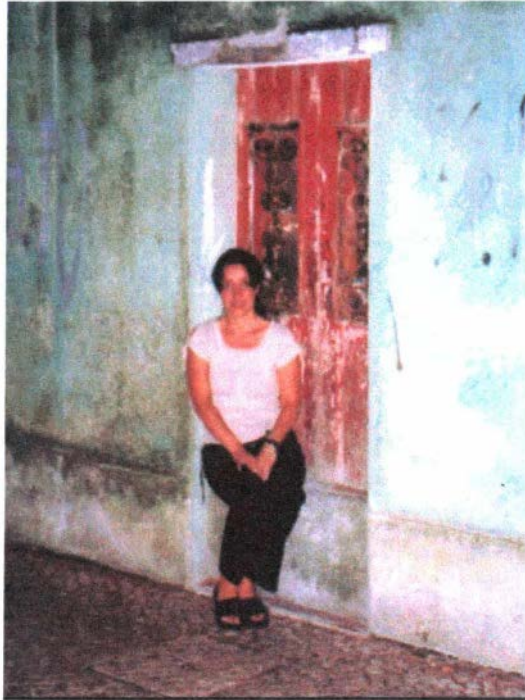
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Notes from an



Un-hyphenated American

By Cacilda Flores-Salvaggio

A Thesis submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York
College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts

December 18, 2004

Notes of an Un-Hyphenated American

By Cacilda G. Flores-Salvaggio

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Date



Chair, Department of English

5-23-05

Date

In dedication to my family:

My husband Mark, for believing in me.

**My son and daughter, Marco and Miranda, for being
patient and supporting me when
I had to work so hard.**

**My father and mother, Joaquim and Fátima,
for being my best friends
and my inspiration.**

**My brother and sister, Tony and Linda, for
always finding the time to listen.**

**Thank you all for
accepting me for who I am.**

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“Form”ally Introduced

I can remember that first workshop course in 2000 with Judith Kitchen when I sat down to write a thank-you letter (or “journey statement” as Judith Kitchen called it) of the semester in Creative Essay: it was about finding a voice and how to develop it over the coming years. Then came the semester that I experienced *Readers as Writers* with Anne Panning. In that course, form became a new *construction* rather than *deconstruction* that enhanced my own voice. Now, in this last phase of my education, I am faced with synthesizing all I learned and reflecting on my stylistic influences.

Throughout this time, certain authors have made an impact on my writing and have modeled how language is manipulated through the author’s craft, but illuminated through an author’s voice. Vivian Gornick, Leila Ahmed, Anne Panning, Marie Arana, Ariel Dorfman, and Anthony Bourdain are authors who have influenced me throughout my graduate work. Their voices have echoed in my own writing and have challenged me to resonate what I have learned through my own voice and my own story. There comes a time when everyone needs an honest self-examination of where they have been and where they are now. Each of these authors managed to re-examine their lives with equal parts of unconventional form, style, and focus--something I have aspired to do.

Fierce Attachments and *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures of the Culinary Underbelly*, offer a smorgasbord of writing strategies, along with a compelling combination of tone, voice, and format that persuades the reader to linger a few more moments with a cup of coffee, reflecting not only on subject matter, but on the nature of

the written page.

Fierce Attachments, written by Vivian Gornick, is a memoir whose subject is the relationship of a daughter and mother in the Bronx during the 1940s and in New York City in the 1980s. But, there is a deeper, more intense subject that surfaces: loneliness and the difficulties of urban life that cause the narrator to have “fierce attachments” to people, places, and her own writing. The memoir records an immense struggle between the author and her mother in a charming, but yet rigorously honest and volatile style.

Fierce Attachments portrays a kind of love-hate relationship common to mothers and daughters in a refreshing manner. I find myself in my own writing wanting to express my feelings with certain relationships that have affected my life as an immigrant. Vivian Gornick gave me insights on how to do this. Gornick wrote this memoir about taking long walks through the city with her mother while carrying on conversations that turn into hot topics and vivid storylines. In my thesis, *Notes of an Un-Hyphenated American*, I also attempt to use dialogue and the tension of relationships to augment my experiences.

In contrast, *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly*, written by Anthony Bourdain, takes the reader from his culinary beginnings as a young adolescent in France to the rowdy kitchens of Provincetown and Manhattan, with sex, drugs, and depression in his adult life, adopting an autobiographical walk, not unlike Gornick’s, as his apparent subject. This memoir also records an immense struggle that lays out a deeper meaning, but not with his mother, with himself as a chef. Bourdain begins his behind the kitchen scenes account by warning the reader that there will be “horror stories,” but continues by confessing, “I wanted to write in Kitchenese, the secret language of cooks, instantly recognizable to anyone who has ever dunked French fries for a summer job or

suffered under the despotic rule of a tyrannical chef or boobish owner” (xii). I wanted to write in *Engloguese* the secret language of Portuguese immigrants, instantly recognizable to anyone who has ever cried for his or her homeland or suffered under the despotic rule of a monstrous teacher.

In addition, Gornick in *Fierce Attachments* uses the literary device of seesawing back and forth through the present-day discussions with the mother and her childhood memories. This technique is ingenious because she can reflect on the relationships her mother and neighbor Nettie had with men and then narrate the life experiences that support these examinations. In class, Dr. Panning said, “In memoir, the writer needs to know when to reflect and when to narrate--to look beyond the self and see why someone should listen to you.” Why is Gornick’s structure so effective? She is successful because she separates herself from the narrator. I have only imagined how I might do this in my own writing. I have always struggled to know when to simply tell or when to give a glimpse of my contemplations, when to write in the present form and when to bring in the past. Now I find I have embarked on a form and style that I believe is like poetic prose.

It is poetic because of the use of the “I” or the “self” that focuses on bringing each specific insight within reach. This caused me to ask if Gornick in her memoir was turning the table, and expecting the reader to reflect on how good nonfiction writing can work. She reflects on her own fierce attachment to writing in her memoir and distinguishes the difference between the consciousness of just telling what is happening between finding the personal narrative. Is this not the key to effective personal writing? Gornick wants the reader to listen to her and uses the power of the singular first person to say why the reader

must listen. She uses title-less segments that flow as a continuous series of unobstructed essays. The reader is able to enjoy the surroundings of the walks at the same time the narrator's reflection immerses the reader in a thoughtful trance in time, an impressive strategy.

Anthony Bourdain also invites the reader on a journey of both past and present. He too uses a blissful balance of "telling" and "reflecting." He too jumps from his fourth grade memories to the everyday life at Les Halles, a successful Manhattan restaurant. However, while using a device similar to Gornick's, he does it in an entirely different form. The reader is offered an intimate look inside the restaurant world, while Gornick's look turned outward to the urban world. Bourdain boldly hands over a menu to the reader offering a three course-meal with dessert, coffee and even a cigarette. This does become an "adventure" for the reader's appetite for the unusual and clever. Bourdain is not poetic, but he is lewdly eloquent. He employs the singular first person differently than does Gornick. He too has a powerful "I," not because he detaches himself from the narrator, but because he *is* the narrator. The structure of his essays is determined by the manner in which the "I" shouts, vents, and rages at the reader not only as the memoir's character, but also through the section and chapter titles he uses.

In the pursuit of finding my prevailing "I," the epigraphs and chapter titles are a way for the voices of the Portuguese community to come together with my own voice. Gornick's and Bourdain's devices helped me to structure my memoir in that unusual way that they do so well. When looking a little closer I found yet another method that was intriguing. The ability to take a certain word and push it another step is one device that both Gornick and Bourdain use that projects their voices off the written page and into the

ears of the reader; this device is also used by Anne Panning--the use of italicized words to emphasize specific tone.

“Remembering, I Was Not There,” by Anne Panning, is a perfect example of how intonation can be made heard and felt. I was *first* struck by this craft when reading, “I wish to sit them both down, say *don’t*. You will destroy yourselves, everything dear. You will make your lives harder than they have to be” (55). She achieves the impact of the weight of that particular word “don’t” in that particular sentence that Joan Frank describes as “the powerful intimacy of the speaker’s lips at your ear” (15) in the article “Imposed Yet Familiar: In Defense of the Memoir.” I attempted to play with tone by italicizing, but more so by using careful placement of certain words in sentences. For example, in the chapter “Frigid Disposition,” I italicized the word “foreigner” to achieve an emphasis on the word being used as a put down by Melanie. It is these simple, but effective techniques that sets Gornick, Bourdain, and Panning apart from other authors.

In addition, these three authors also manage to make a connection to one of my inspiring authors, Ariel Dorfman. In his marvelous memoir, *Heading South, Looking North: A Bilingual Journey*, Dorfman manipulates language as language once manipulated him. He throws traditional composition rules out the window. He uses style as a companion to content his rhythm is far too quick and sophisticated to hang out with either one device. He even uses unconventional techniques that make the most confident writer shake his or her head in awe. Best of all, he uses description that sends the reader on a virtual tour of vivid snapshots reserved only for the most prized tourist. Dorfman weaves a texture that exists in the depths of adulthood and childhood as did Gornick and Bourdain. *Heading South, Looking North* is an autobiography with an inside look at the

Chilean revolution and an outward glance at exile. It begins in the arms of “Death at an Early Age,” centers on the “Discovery of Life and Language,” peaks with an explosion of rebellion due to injustice, and ends in a “blanket of words” that turns this narrative, “Linus-like, into an inseparable companion” (203).

This protective blanket is reused in various ways. At first, I had to be extra careful to notice each layer in the metaphorical swathe in Dorfman’s memoir. While reading I found myself like a middle-school child hurrying to the content of my undertaking without reading the directions. Each chapter has a title and I skipped over them in my enthusiasm to continue on this bilingual journey. Just like that student who stops suddenly in the middle of the task and has a gut feeling something is wrong, I too halted and realized that reading the titles was essential to see through Dorfman’s window to time. The titles alternate between past and present to telescope his discovery of death, life, and language. I was sure not to feel lost in Ariel Dorfman’s flip-flopping technique of life experiences juxtaposed in different time schemes to find out where I was and why, when I took the opportunity as a two-second breather to read the titles. As a more experienced reader now, I am able to notice these various techniques in all these authors’ accounts.

In addition, these authors also use unconventional sentence punctuations, such as colons and hyphens in order to avoid hesitation or interruption. After analyzing this, I became empowered to intentionally use colons and especially hyphens, as a metaphor of my two-part world and hyphenated identity. These authors also manipulate grammar and mechanics to various ends--sometimes a single sentence contains several types of punctuation like parentheses, colons, semicolons, quotations, hyphens, and ellipses to

highlight the oral storytelling technique. How do Dorfman, Gornick, Panning and Bourdain do this? By taking a risk and laying it all out on the table.

This shows me that a bilingual writer does not have to conform to the conventions of ESOL. Instead writers can play, work, and rest with movement of each word in the sentence. It also shows me, that no matter what kind of style, voice, and craft an author uses, there is a foundation of great nonfiction creative writing upon which to build.

Here are writers who explore the self by using the past and the present; they examine relationships to the people around them, they investigate characteristics of their social and cultural backgrounds, and foremost they seek a deeper understanding of themselves. They do this in a style in which the “emphasis is different” and they do it to please themselves while pleasing the reader in a “fierce” and “confidential,” not *impossible*, approach. It’s a style that I thought was impossible because of my bilingual and bicultural situation. These authors helped me retrieve confidence in my writing.

Leila Ahmed and Marie Arana successfully build a bicultural bridge using a bilingual foundation. These authors are able to address the socio-economic, linguistic and cultural aspects of personal histories that converge to make a person who they are, all expressed in a highly charged yet objective tone. Even though I have acquired a less charged voice, I have hung on to the inner conflict of my immigration experience just as Arana and Ahmed do.

In *A Border Passage*, Leila Ahmed creates an account of the inner conflicts of a generation coming of age during and after the collapse of European imperialism. She accomplishes this in a language that evokes the lush summers of Cairo and the gray winters of England’s Universities. She begins her memoir with this quotation of Rumi,

“To hear the song of the reed / Everything you have ever known / must be left behind”

(1). This begins Ahmed's expression of how vividly she remembers her childhood during her Cairo days. She continues, “There was, to begin with, always sound--sometimes no more than a mere breath--of the wind in the trees, each variety of tree having its own music, its own way of conversing” (3). This recollection of a home that is surrounded by beauty is quickly replaced by Ahmed's exploration of the controversial political, religious, and cultural conflicts of Egypt.

She incorporates informative examples of social corruption, religious and geographical facts, dates on a never-ending Egyptian timeline, and political histories along with memories of an Arab child growing up in Egypt. As a result, one of the most interesting topics that Ahmed addresses is the difference between oral traditions and written texts. To honor oral traditions, Ahmed successfully manipulates the written word to jump off the page as if it were an oral narrative. She does this differently than Gornick and Bourdain because she depicts crucial historical events such as the 1948 War with Israel, the Nasserite Socialism of the Suez Canal, the end of British Colonialism, the rise of Arab Nationalism, and the breakdown of a multi-religious society, by *talking* about each event as she lived through them as a child, teen, and woman.

I moved toward this idea of going beyond the core issue of oral text by conceptualizing the stories told to me by my parents and other family members. For example, I felt it necessary to include details of the early South African years when I was a child told through my mother's spoken words. I wasn't sure how to approach this type of writing until reading about the experiences, traditions, and cultures of other authors such as Ahmed. At the end of *A Border Passage*, Ahmed once again quotes Rumi, “This is

how it always is / when I finish a poem. / A great silence overcomes me, / and I wonder why I ever thought / to use language”(306). These poetic lines determine Ahmed’s ultimate position in the struggle between oral and textual Islam and cultural awareness versus an identity exploration. In retrospect, Ahmed enabled me to search for my identity as I explored why I hadn’t previously used written language to tell my story as I remembered it.

Digging deeper through the mist of memory in the Peruvian journey of dominant symbolic recollections of Marie Arana’s memoir, *American Chica*, the reader hungers to know if at any point Arana may have gambled with her identity against assimilation. In the end, the reader is not disappointed; Arana dares to reveal herself in “two Worlds and one childhood” in a flourish of similes, descriptive language, and sensory images that capture the reader. At one point the reader is not only hungry, but ravenous for more because Arana uses strategies that satisfy the palate in every hue imaginable.

Arana’s inquisitiveness allows for imagery to coincide with the imaginary (an ingredient found in fiction). “I ended up so divided between the two sides of my hybrid family that I boomeranged with a burning curiosity” (55). Throughout her childhood journey, Arana continued to break through racial barriers to overcome life’s hardships. This may sound serious instead of entertaining. For example, Arana uses dialogue to set up Marie’s plea to her mother that her friend, a Peruvian native servant, come to her party. She uses everyday speech to convey her mother’s message that no one else will attend the party if Margarita is present and similar to Panning she italicizes “her” to emphasize how different her guest is from the other guests. “I don’t want the other girls, Mother. I want *her*” (117). She also uses a voice that gently reminds the reader that it is nonfiction.

“Looking back at that exact point in my childhood, it’s clear to me that I may have known that I was divided, but I didn’t know there were more classifications than two” (117).

This tender tone that speaks of cultural identity continues to stress awareness of cultural separation along the way as it raises awareness of my own cultural separation throughout my adolescent years. This is why I decided to include the chapter titled “Portuguese Diva” in my thesis. I, too, needed to use a voice that softly reminded the reader that this really happened. However, unlike Ahmed who tackled her narrative as cultural awareness versus an identity search, Arana experiences it as a blend of both. This is the approach I identify most with and as Arana’s style slowly compels the *American Chica* to tell its story, I slowly understood how to do it.

Both Ahmed and Arana, along with Dorfman, vary in their method of expressing the national aspects of society’s ethnicities; however, they use the same approach in linguistic change. The use of foreign language in each text positions language as the bridge of a two-place stance. There are two languages demonstrated in these texts; Spanish and Arabic. Interestingly the translation or a description of the foreign word without the translation follows the foreign words.

For example, in *A Border Passage* Ahmed uses a clear definition of *badraun*. “The main focus of my childhood terror was the Locked Room, but there was also the *badraun*, the basement” (102). Clearly her preference is to provide immediate translation as she also uses parentheses in other instances. “If you took the back route you would pass through the heart of Matariyya, then through the center of Zatoun, both of them *shaabi* (popular) districts that gradually became, over the course of my childhood, more and more densely crowded” (101). This system works well for Ahmed because of her

strength and highly charged voice. She pounds out the words, “I remember how I hated that incessant rhetoric. *Al-qawniyya al Arabiyya! Al-Uraba! Nahnu al -Arab! Arab Nationalism! Arabness! We the Arabs*” (244)! This is direct, ideal, and steadfast. Many readers may find this practice comforting and reliable; however, there are readers who might find a well-defined description of the intended thought or word preferable.

For example, Arana moves rapidly forward with this diverse linguistic change philosophy in *An American Chica*. “All I remember is my father and Georgie chatting aimlessly in the wide front seat next to Don Pepe, while mother, Vicki, and I chatted aimlessly in the rear- *hombres en frente, mujeres atras, Peruvian style*” (134). It is appealing to have her describe this mode of traveling with the men in the front seat of the car and the women in the rear seat; the reader does not need a direct translation to figure out the Spanish words (men in front, women in back). She also uses a foreign word again and again without description or translation. How? Arana has already introduced the word and then uses it again and again. This supports the true everyday life of conversational language. This type of linguistic insertion adds flavor and intensity to the ethnicity of each memory, scene, and idea. Is this an approach that pushes the readers to not only identify but understand the cultural difference?

This question prompts me to think about how to approach Portuguese terminology without giving meaning away too easily, urging the reader to subtly approach the Portuguese language as a means to recognize cultural differences. In addition, like Arana, I also repeat words to establish the daily life of a Portuguese person so the reader can identify with the Portuguese culture, in hopes that the repeated word will also add strength and a hint of the ethnicity that embed my experiences during my assimilation.

Finally, there is no better example of generational cultural evolution than Ahmed's written word that speaks to the people with a credence that resonates with the oral traditions of yesteryear as related by the poet who Ahmed continuously quotes.

There is no better form of storytelling than Arana's ability to conceive strategies that put life into words and pictures in the minds of the readers, other than her very own metaphorical theme of earthquakes as a symbol of tormented love reflecting her independent North American mother and her traditional family-orientated South American father.

There is no better attitude to tell it the way it is than Gornick and Bourdain's metaphorical walks of life that re-examine the self in a vivid, deep, and sometimes aggressive manner. The ability to say it the way it is captures not only the reader's interest but also can remain in the reader's thoughts for days.

There is no better way to focus on *construction* versus *deconstruction* than the way Anne Panning does by simply demonstrating it or discussing it in workshop. She also has the ability to interpret, comprehend and focus on form and format whether it is an italicized word to push the reader a little farther than expected, or by *remembering* that an essay can stand-alone or amidst other essays is profound.

There is no better strategy than Dorfman's, which uses bilingual challenges to defy the grammarians of the literary world. His risk taking with a paragraph-length sentence and time-portal chapter titles, and his resisting conventions is a model that will resonate as loud as the content of his memoir.

These authors have the ability to complicate this genre with creativity. They are always insisting on the personal in the face of the public, marking their identity,

manipulating the words on paper, and extending themselves to the reader in unconventional ways. Their use of the socio-economic, linguistic and cultural aspects of histories that converge to make a person who they are in diverse voices makes lasting associations among the author, characters and most importantly the reader. This connection becomes a reinvented “passage” that gently guides readers towards “Heading South” and “Looking North.” It is about *remembering* the “adventures” of more than just “two worlds.” It’s also about the “attachment” of the writer to the reader.

Mostly, I would have not been able to accomplish this creative writing journey without the guidance and expertise of my thesis director and dedicated readers. It has been with their critical support on craft and collaborating leadership on voice, that I have been able to write *Notes from an Un-Hyphenated American* and finish my last graduate requirement with pride and become “form”ally introduced.

"I was 14-years-old a teenager who left friends behind and came to a country so different that even today the climate is still difficult to endure. I cried a lot.

This culture is a different ball game and I was fortunate to have the Nobrega family, especially Lino and Marcelina, to show me a way around.

They were my translation in school, my connection to a social life and a wall to lean on in this new way of life in a new country. It was very difficult. I was alone. My father was 57-years-old and my mother was 49 when we came over.

They had no skills, no language, and no trade for work.

They struggled making minimum wage, worked long hours and walked from Mt. Read Boulevard to Maple Street in all kinds of weather. However, it was the bilingual staff at General Circuits who became a support group for my parents at work.

It was friends like the Flores family who would give my parents more than just a ride from the grocery store. It is the kindness of friends and strangers that guided us when we had a limited number of family members.

I look up to my parents for coming here to make me a better person. The spirit of the immigrant is courage. Coming to America in the '70s after having emigrated from two other countries shows courage. The biggest struggles, the language, the culture, everything at home was nearby,

a store in every corner, vehicles were a luxury not a necessity.

It was their spirit of never-giving-up that became my lesson in life."

Antonio Vieira, age 41

Ovos Dourados—Golden Eggs

This was also the same lesson I learned during my immigrant life—never to give up. Never give up by working hard to provide my children with more than what I had, never give up by educating myself and finding those opportunities to prosper economically, and never give up on passing our Portuguese heritage, culture, and traditions on to my children and the following generations. All I have to do in case I feel like giving up is what every Portuguese immigrant does—pick a memory, close my eyes, and remember . . .

. . . laughing echoing through the screen door of our brightly lit kitchen.

Gurgling sounds intertwined with the clanking of the pots my mother meticulously moved around while cooking. Easter Sunday morning would never be the same without the excitement of our Portuguese Easter egg hunt and my mother's mouth-watering labor of love. Marinated rabbit served with peas in a garlic, tomato, and wine sauce. Pork roast with all the fixings, and desserts that stretched from our dining table to the front door: *Pão-de-Ló*, a type of sponge cake made in a bundt pan, my mother's favorite; *Salada de Fruta*, a fruit salad made with Port wine, my father's favorite, *Pão Duce*, a sweet Portuguese Easter bread twisted with sliced almonds and candied fruits, my brothers and sister's favorite; and an all American chocolate cream pie, my cousins' favorite.

My kid cousin Nelio flew in the kitchen colliding with my little sister. "I found eight eggs!" he yelled at no one in particular while stuffing Portuguese Easter bread in his mouth.

My brother strutted in and proudly stated, "I only found two, but one is the onion egg!" My mother, as tradition holds, uses onionskins to produce

golden-red eggs. *Ovos Dourados*. . . .

Ever since I got married, every Saturday morning on Easter weekend I reach for my old pot, basket of onionskins which have been accumulating since that March, and a dozen eggs. I fill the pot with cool water, lovingly place the eggs inside and cover them with a thick layer of onionskins. As I push the brittle, delicate skins into the water, my chest swells, my breathing becomes labored and I travel to a place only a Portuguese Flores child can find. A place where visions of family coming together fill a void in a way that is so gratifying a Flores child can't imagine it any other way.

It is essential that my own children find their way to this magical place. So I call out to them, year after year, and ask for help. They begin to search for all twelve eggs smothered among the limp, purple onionskins and thick wine-colored water. Each time, no matter how old they are, I see their amazed faces exhibiting awe as each egg is lifted at different intervals. The focus is on each individual color: pale gold, light golden brown, bronzed caramel, flaxen purple, bright burgundy, and rich deep wine tones. One day they too will share this with their children.

Ultimately, these eggs will be meticulously placed in a basket. They stand out from the bright pastel American eggs, just like the Moorish monarchs among the peasants. This is evidence of our family's multiculturalism. America's subtle influence filters through, blending, cooperating, and the end result goes unnoticed by us all. Just as this past Easter I noticed what had been unnoticed. The children are older, the family larger and the egg hunt is dominated by the next generation in our own homes. But we still congregate around the same kitchen table peeling boiled pastel and golden-red eggs, sprinkling them with just the right amount of table salt and popping them in our mouths,

eyes closing, jaws slowly chewing, and to wash it all down, a sip of Portuguese Port wine.

Laughter resumes and anticipation for lunch grows. It all goes unnoticed in the thrill of the day. The Portuguese traditions of the past and the American customs of today persist; they penetrate with each year just as the color of an ordinary onion skin penetrates the shell of our *Ovos Dorados*.

*“I am who I am. A piece of paper that naturalizes me
to a certain country doesn't change that.”*

Antonio Manuel Flores, age 43

Naturalizing-Self

During this time in my life it seems natural to remain a legal resident alien growing up in a very traditional Portuguese environment . My roots, my heritage, my culture are a vital part of my being and because of this commitment, it is difficult during my early adulthood to face the decision to become a citizen of the United States of America. My mother and father made a choice not to naturalize as U.S. citizens because of their retirement goal to return to Portugal. They cling to our Portuguese customs and language like honey to a tilted spoon.

My brother feels that the naturalization examination and the oral interview would be too difficult. “Besides,” he said in a matter-of-fact way, “it’s not a priority.” My sister always displays defiance when the subject arises. I can hear her passionate young voice ring out at a family Sunday meal. “Caci, if I give that up, it would be the last string, my last ties, and the last link to my Portuguese identity. It prevents my ability to say, ‘this is who I am’ and I don’t know why I feel this way. The U.S. makes me denounce my Portuguese citizenship and this is why I won’t naturalize!”

So, my immediate family has an immense influence concerning this issue. During these early adulthood times my surroundings continue to embrace the security of tradition. All that was familiar was founded on citizenship. Citizenship was the one thing that we could control. We had the power to keep it the same or to change it, unlike the language, the food, and the customs.

However, as I probe my memories, I realize that they all consist of family, food, church, and music--the basis of our Portuguese culture. Our holidays, birthdays,

sacraments, and even lazy Sundays still capture the essence of what makes me who I am. The customs and battles that my family faced, along with the ability to enter the “generation of acculturation” by successfully assimilating, have made me a proud Portuguese and a grateful American.

The ultimate factor in my naturalization dilemma materializes shortly after my second child is born. I reflect on my high school sweetheart and now husband, Mark; my firstborn son, Marco; and my newborn daughter, Miranda. I appreciate that this is the country where I have given birth to my own family, designed my own familiar traditions, and founded my own belief system. I accept that I will remain living here until death does us four part. I consider that it’s not only because my husband and two children are American-born, but also because that for twenty years I have lived with them, have worked hard, and have educated myself in the U.S.A. with my new little family. It’s not just about my mother, father, brother, sister anymore. I may be Portuguese, but I now am part of a family unit that is American. I may have traditional beliefs and customs, but I am forming new roots that blend with my culture and that ignite new traditions. Hence, I’m developing a desire to foster a complete family entity and now I find myself entering, with little hesitation, the inevitable naturalization process.

* * * * *

I sit at my husband's roll-top mahogany desk that his grandfather built; I take a deep breath as I call the United States Immigration and Naturalization office. It is surprising that no personal representative answers the phone. A recorded message with office hours, how to obtain an application in person, and directions to the department monotonously gives me the information I need. It seems such a cold way to greet a person who is seeking information on such an important and personal nature. I shrug it off, get into my white '85 Cavalier and head to downtown Rochester.

When I arrive at the Federal Building I stand frozen at the glass sliding door. Realizing that I am taking the first step in what is going to be an emotional process, I take a moment to mull over things, asking myself whether or not I want to do this, wondering if I need to bring anything, and fixing my hair for the third time. I go through the motions of checking in at security, read the directory, and find the Naturalization office.

The first thing that strikes me about the office as I wait my turn, is the official appearance. In the corner stands a large American flag. Its symbolic significance makes it seem larger than it really is and the employees all have on uniforms that represent the law enforcement. Despite the authoritative presence, the woman who calls me over to the long, chest-high desk is receptive and helpful.

This woman's face speaks compassion, in striking difference to the starched uniform. Her wheat blond hair is neatly combed, with a small bun tucked beneath a navy blue cap, white crisp collar, and a red, white, and blue scarf meticulously tied around her neck that frames her light-blue eyes. She goes over all the requirements and answers my questions about the forms. Holding my application as I leave, I understand that I'm not giving up my past, something that always seemed to be the issue, I am giving myself a gift.

At that moment, I am tying all my loose ends together, contrary to what my sister had always proclaimed. The content of this gift is not important at this moment, but the long ribbon that I choose to represent what I am about to become with my family is a glorious red, white, and blue bow.

It takes a couple days for me to sit down and complete the application. I'm not sure if it is hesitation or purely time constraints. Whatever the reason, here I am, pen in hand, a glass of ice water at my side for my drying mouth, and soft music that lessens my pounding heart. It is a long four-page form, maybe to coincide with the long process ahead. Some of the questions seem strange. The U.S. is asking me if I am affiliated or involved in the Communist party. It asks if I am a member of the Nazi organization. It also has questions regarding criminal records or actions in the applicant's native country or in the U.S.

Why would I impose harm or break the laws on my newly found home, my adopted country that has taken me in and sheltered me most of my life? I know, without a doubt, what it feels like to live without the luxuries that even the lower-income class in America has. Spending my summers in Portugal, I had to make sure that the water heater tank, about the size of a gas grill tank, was filled before taking a shower. I know what it feels like to have been stripped of the simplest of freedoms. Having had to remain silent, not being able to speak unless spoken to. Why would I gamble with the welfare of my country with such debauched behavior? Especially when our country builds immigration walls that are easily penetrable to all. Is this why our country is paralyzed by the fear of terrorism?

My hands become cold while I begin filling out the application. My fingers start to

tingle like when your foot falls asleep. I stare at the application, I blink, squint-- comparable to stepping outside on a sunny day from a movie theatre--and reread the next direction. On the form it states, Name (to be used if different from above). *Could this be an opportunity to have my background linked with my new identity?* I could hear it. *Flores-Salvaggio*. I become conscious of the fact that I can hyphenate my maiden name with my married name. Now my children would have an irrevocable record of whom Mommy was growing up and who Mommy has become with them. Astonished that I hadn't thought of this before, I feel fortunate that the content of my selfless gift holds such a treasure.

The application states that I need to include passport pictures. As a child I remember my father dragging all of us to take our Alien card pictures. "Turn your head to the left, lift your chin, and show your right ear, look above the lens and now, smile." By the time I was a teenager I would roll my eyes and say, "Yeah, right." I'm in the most unnatural position and the photographer wants me to smile, I think. *Has anyone figured out that this is why the native always looks so pathetic and is rarely smiling in these pictures?* So, despite the unpleasant recollections, off I go to Wal-Mart, hoping that the experience can be somehow different.

I can't have gotten anymore American than Wal-Mart. Where else can I purchase a chili cheese hot dog, plush towels, Hanes sweatshirts, pots and pans or stemware, and sensible shoes, and also take passport pictures? I reach the photo department and explain what I need. I become disappointed as the employee verbalizes the directions and requirements for first-time passport holders. Same procedure, only this time I have to stand on a wooden block instead of sitting on a steel stool. "Turn your head to the left.

Lift your chin. No, you don't have to show your ear, but you do have to look at the blue cross on the lens," the photographer says, and adding that the pictures will take at least ten minutes to develop. While I wait, I begin to ponder all the requirements to establish myself as a citizen--a lot more than I ever thought.

The next day I take both my children with me on the only part of this application procedure that can be anything close to a real adventure. We dress up in our best casual clothes; Marco in his hot green pant outfit, Miranda in her Osh Kosh skirt overalls, and I in my favorite Casual Corner sweater. We show up at the police station located at our town hall because I need my fingerprints taken by my district police office. The three of us decide to try to see as much of the local holding jail as we can. With my daughter clinging to my hand and my son walking so close to me, I am lucky that I don't fall flat on my face when I arrive at the reception window. My children's feeling of intimidation become contagious as I ring the bell.

When the police officer, who instantly reminds me of Officer Friendly, asks if I need assistance, I lose that sense of concern. Explaining why I am there, I see he immediately becomes excited and puts me at ease with his congeniality. "Come on in, we don't get this sort of thing on a regular day." He walks around the window and opens the door for us. Upon seeing the children his excitement grows along with his smile. The officer kneels down and asks their name and age, which also makes them feel better. I like to see an adult get down at eye level when speaking to children; it is less threatening to them and says a lot about that particular adult. It makes a "we are equal" statement to the child.

Requesting that we follow him toward the back of the building, he begins to

explain that the Gates Police Department is very small and has nothing real thrilling to show. Looking at my children's wide-eyed faces, I know that this will be exhilarating. Stopping and informing the children that we have to go to the area where they arrest people, he lowers himself again and gently says, "Mommy didn't do anything bad, but she needs to record her fingerprints to become an American citizen, which is a very good thing."

Smiling nervously, I say, "Thank you, officer; not many people would stop to think of the children's feelings."

Smiling back he genuinely replies, "Oh, this place is nothing to us, but to children it's a scary place and, as much as we want to scare kids straight, it just doesn't work. Let's get to it, shall we?"

The children and I get a first rate tour. We view equipment that the police use to check the blood-alcohol count. Marco and Miranda touch the bars of two small holding cells and my son is brave enough to walk inside one of the cells. Both oversee the actual fingerprinting process, producing toothy smiles. My son intensely watches my fingers being forced into the ink and then being pushed to roll on the squares of the card. He asks in a hushed tone, "Mom, what does it feel like?"

I pensively respond, watching my prints materialize, "The ink actually feels like cold smooth mud."

Ultimately the tour ends with stickers, magnets, coloring books and hugs. This is the utmost experience, especially because Officer Friendly gives me a silver, plastic sheriff's badge too. I always wanted my brother's, to go with my cowboy hat, but he never gave it up and I never got one for a present. As we leave, my son declares, "That

was cool, wait till we tell Daddy!” I too can't wait to tell my husband about that day, but mostly I need to hear his reassuring words that this was what I had been wanting for a long time.

* * * * *

I am standing at the mail box across the street from my home. Looking through the pile of junk mail envelopes, I discover a letter from the United States Immigration Office in Buffalo. It has been two months since I submitted the application. Opening the crisp vanilla-colored envelope, I read, *You have been selected by the United States Board of Naturalization to be officially interviewed on the nature of your application and examined on the knowledge of the United States of America's history and language* The rest becomes blurred as relief turns into anticipation. Knowing that I had an interview and an exam in three weeks my elation quickly turns into anxiety. *How am I going to prepare for this? Nervousness sets in. Would I pass this exam? How can I study or what should I study?* As I walk back to the house, I hear the phone ring. I answer it and hear my brother's tender voice. “Hi, Linda. I mean Caci.” I could hear a slight snicker. He always teases me that he loves my sister Linda more than me.

“Hey, Tony, I know you love Linda more than me, but what can I do? What's going on?” My brother lives in New Jersey and long distance phone calls aren't the place to waste time chitchatting.

“Well, I have been thinking about becoming an American citizen and heard you have looked into it. Could you share any information?” I couldn’t believe it; I hadn’t shared with anyone the steps I had taken up until that moment.

Wishing he were in front of me so I could kiss him, I ask, “Why now?”

“Well, I’ve been thinking,” he said, “I have two sons now and a wife who are American, and, if I become a citizen, I can get a promotion at work, so it kind of feels right. Besides, I want to vote.”

I quietly answer back, “I know.”

I tell him what I know and that I will call him when I find out how to prepare for the interview and exam. I hang up feeling assured, but still indecisive about what to do about my next step. The only thing I can think of doing is to visit my local library. Since the age of 13, when I first began reading English fluently, I would hibernate in the depths of the stacked books at the Arnett Branch library in the 19th ward. I have come to trust the librarians as an invaluable resource for entertainment or business purposes. Even now, I use the Gates library for most of my investigative needs.

I decide to take my nine-year-old son Marco with me. His passion for research definitely would be soothing. Once at the library, we go straight to the reference desk. The head librarian, Mr. Montione, is a short, middle-aged man. His tie is on crooked and his off-white shirt looks as if he has pulled it out of the laundry basket. His dark-haired head begins swaying left to right as I explain that I’m going to take an exam for naturalization. He doesn’t even wait for me to ask if the library has any information on this topic. He hunches his shoulders forward and quickly turns, disappearing into the maze of bookshelves. He returns quite quickly with various materials. We find out that

there is a preparation book for the interview and in the thick text there is a section on what to study for the exam.

My son whispers, “Bingo.”

We also find out that I need to memorize the names of current officials in local, state, and federal government positions. I glance up, but Mr. Montione leaves us with the books that are available before we can even thank him.

My eager son and I dig into the newly found volumes. Marco is amused to find out that I need to know things like what the Declaration of Independence is and who was the first president of the United States of America. He thinks I have it made, until I show him questions like: Who wrote the “Star Spangled Banner” and what is the supreme right as a citizen? We are in such a state of intrigue with both of our heads buried in the musty pages that we don’t even hear Mr. Montione approach. We do hear someone clearing their throat and look up as a reflex. He quickly hands me a pamphlet that names all the officials in government offices, informing me that two positions have changed with recent elections and for me to call the number at the bottom of the pamphlet in order to obtain the names of the new officials. This time Mr. Montione allows me a fraction of a second to say, “Thank you.” He nods and swiftly disappears again.

We pack our things up, check out the library’s precious property, and say goodnight to Mr. Montione as he pushes a book onto a shelf by the exit. As I leave, I wonder if our resourceful reference librarian is resourceful enough to find me a book titled, Finding Self-Confidence: Facing the Naturalization Interview.

* * * * *

On May 16, 1995, I am traveling to Buffalo, New York where I am to be tested.

This time I choose my dearest and closest friend, Calli, to accompany me on the journey to the interview and examination. She loves the fact that I speak another language; never feels offended if I break out speaking Portuguese to my family in front of her. She tries all of our Portuguese entrées and even learns how to make some of them. She is honest and forgiving—she puts up with my stupid statements or American malapropisms, as she would say in defending me, that come out at the wrong time and wrong place in the wrong way. She is patient with my Old World ways and loyal to my culture and Catholic faith.

I think she truly understands that even though the Portuguese have an open, liberal society, we do place greater emphasis on religious faith and moral values than anything else. Honesty, kindness, and being a good, well-rounded individual are highly valued qualities in our community. Our Portuguese families are proud of our heritage, sense of nation and economic progress. We believe friendship should be strong and last a lifetime. Calli loves all of this about me and even tells me that she admires the way I try to instill these values in my own two children. This is why I choose her to go on that particular trip. I could have asked my mom, another friend, or Mark to take off a day of work, but I didn't want to. I knew Calli would make it as special as it needs to be.

Even though we set off on our escapade on schedule, I still feel rushed. I am grumpy, asking what time it is every five minutes, and fighting the urge to speed. Trying to calm me, Calli begins to quiz me on some of the material I need to know. I answer only a few incorrectly. She tries reassuring me that most born American citizens who had been through our education system can't answer most of those questions. I am too edgy to accept her invitation to relax.

My nervousness only becomes worse when I realize that I forgot the directions to the Federal Building. Panicking, I screech, “How could I be so stupid? What are we going to do? We’re no where near a phone?”

“Relax Caci. I’ve got my cell phone. We’ll just call the office for directions,” Calli responds, enunciating each word slowly. She calls for directions and we’re back on track.

Shortly after arriving in Buffalo, we are lost. *Some* directions! The industrialized streets add to our frustration. Not one trusted soul to direct us in the midst of the early morning congestion. Fortunately, not by following the poor directions of the person we phoned, but by driving around in circles downtown and with sheer luck, we find the towering building. It casts a shadow at the next traffic light. “There it is!” we both shout. I stop at the red light, unbuckle my seat belt and ask Calli to park the car. There we are at a main intersection practicing a Chinese fire drill--something I hadn’t done since I was 8-years-old.

I run up the steps, my heart racing with only two minutes to spare. The thirty seconds it takes for the guard to check me in seems an eternity. As I rode the elevator, my thoughts are zooming around with all the information that I am trying to pack in the already crowded compartment of my short-term memory. As a result, I become dizzy. Out loud I say, “Take a deep breath, Caci.” I do. I hold it and let each measured breath out slowly. I gradually begin to regain composure.

“Hi, I have an appointment for nine-thirty,” I say as leisurely as I can.

“Your name?” the clerk blankly asks, not looking up.

“Cacilda Flores-Salvaggio.” I state each name together for the first time. She looks up and says, “It will be a few minutes until the interviewer officer can meet with

you. Please have a seat and he will come out for you shortly.”

I turn and quickly take in the room. *Where should I sit?* I want to be able to see the examiner before he sees me. I walk over to the windows--they have no blinds or curtains, so I can concentrate on the view, take my journal out, and wait for Calli to arrive. Sitting, I began to look around and absorb all the historical details that decorate the walls: various flags representing the eras of American history, framed photos of scenery from the Buffalo area during the 1800s, and earlier period artifacts in an enclosed glass case. The room is brightly painted in a pastel yellow. It is a large room with portraits of famous presidents and governors hanging on the walls. The waiting room is very calming. The last thing I need when feeling anxious is a small claustrophobic room decorated in dark colors and nothing to look at but year-old magazines.

Suddenly, Calli enters the room with a ray of sunshine emitting on her. She is smiling and visibly thrilled. She looks straight at me. She knows exactly how to read my emotions and how to respond to them. She sits next to me, and holds my hand. Without her, going through this next step wouldn't have meant half as much. With such youthfulness she blurts out, “This is so exciting, thank you for letting me be a part of this process.” She is thanking *me*, when it should be the other way around. That's Calli. A long horn sound interrupts our conversation as a door swings open. Looking up as my name begins echoing through a blinding bright tunnel, I know the time has come. “Here goes,” I say through clenched teeth, feeling fretful. The walls of the room fade away as I walk to the agent. “Good luck, I know you'll do great.” I faintly hear Calli's supportive words.

The officer, whose name I cannot remember, apologizes for being late and escorts

me to his office. Expecting an overpowering person, he is actually very pleasant, making idle chit-chat to ease the moment. He is down-to-earth with his tie loosened and collar unbuttoned. "I've already put in a day's work just by dropping my son off at daycare," he says. He is in his late twenties or early thirties with a dignified demeanor. He begins explaining what the procedure will be like and how long it will take. With that formality out of the way, we begin the interview. He asks me to take an oath so that all the information I give will be truthful and honest. This creates an air of importance and adds a certain decorum. I breathe in through my nose and let out the stifling air through my stiff lips.

When I place my hand on the Bible, the cold leather sends shivers up my spine. I begin to worry and silently ask myself if I will be able to keep my cultural identity when this is all over. *Am I still who I am, even though I'm denouncing my Portuguese citizenship? Is this considered betrayal?* All the questions my sister continued to ask and all the answers that my brother contained in his heart, guide me through the interview. The agent's controlled voice brings me back as he asks, "Could you please read a paragraph from any page in this book?" Opening the weathered history text to a random page, I read out loud about the era of western expansion. He abruptly stops me after a few sentences as he leans forward on the metal desk and says, "That's enough. Now write down the sentences that I'm going to dictate." *This is easy.* I am still tense though.

The examiner begins to ask me questions for the oral exam. He asks a question that I hadn't studied for because it had been tucked away in my prior knowledge compartment since the fifth grade.

“Where was the Declaration of Independence written?”

I answered, “Pittsburgh.”

Smiling, he sits back in his 1950s roller chair and asks, “Are you nervous?”

I hastily respond, “I am and I’m not sure why.”

“Please try to relax; you are obviously a well-educated person and I’m only going to ask you a few more questions instead of all fifty, as I’m sure you’re expecting. I can clearly see that you will be a wonderful candidate for naturalization.”

I couldn't believe my ears or my luck.

“Let’s start from the beginning of the oral questionnaire.”

***No problem.* All the tension seeps out of my toes and I respond to a few questions--answering all of them correctly this time.**

Finally, he shoves some paperwork towards me and requests my name in print and a signature. I ask if I could hyphenate my name. He smiles again and says, “You can write your name any way you want.” I am delighted. I print Cacilda Graça Flores-Salvaggio and below I slowly sign my new name for the first time. He hands me my official sealed certificate; stands, and shakes my hand across the desk, as he nobly states, “Congratulations, Cacilda Flores-Salvaggio, you have been accepted to be a citizen of the United States of America.” He continues by informing me that I will be receiving a letter with the date and time that I will officially be sworn in. I feel like dancing. Seeing Calli with her hands crossed in her lap, wearing a soothing look on her face, I am overwhelmed to know I have someone special to share this memorable moment with. Calli’s exquisite almond-shaped eyes look into mine. My heart leaps as I wrap my arms around her and whisper, “I’m an American.”

We celebrate at Jim Kelly's restaurant, the popular quarterback for the Buffalo Bill's for lunch. We order a ton of food. Calli always introduces me to new foods. That day it was All-American. Greasy cheese fries. Thick turkey burgers with the works. Hearty three bean chili. We share the entrees, then walk off the hefty fare at the midtown mall acting like teenagers, arm in arm, window-shopping. We find our way back to the parking garage and decide to take the scenic route home along Route 104. We aren't sure how to get to Route 104 without a map. Somehow, it is insignificant.

* * * * *

On August 8, 1995, I am about to take the oath of allegiance in a ceremony conducted by the Supreme Court in Rochester, New York. I arrive at the downtown courthouse with my son at my heels, my husband Mark opening doors, my mother running to keep up while holding Miranda and putting on my daughter's shoes, and Calli surprising me in the ornate marble floor lobby. All of us stand in a long line to move through the metal detectors. My heart is racing; my palms are sweating, and my head is buzzing, this time out of exhilaration. I've left all nervousness, confusion, doubt, and guilt back with the kind examiner in Buffalo.

Once upstairs in the federal building, my family and Calli stand in a group lovingly looking at me. I look away, afraid I'll start crying. I make the first move to enter the courtroom. They all follow. As my proud mother holds my hand, Marco holds Mark's, and Miranda hold's Calli's, we stare up and around the room. I become drawn to the

inner meaning of the four walls. The courtroom is adorned in dignity and hope with all the intricately carved wooden furniture. It is painted in varying hues of skin colors: light beiges, clay reds, soft yellows, and rich browns. The walls shine with the blend of honor and freedom reflected from the crystal chandelier. The courtroom is a melting pot of culture, race, tradition, and religion. Like the grand Rockefeller Christmas tree in New York City, the people entering become ornaments and the luminous star is the enormous seal of the United States of America. "In God We Trust, In Liberty and in Justice for All" read the inscription. "Everyone please be seated," a voice beckons all to sit and become quiet.

The ceremony begins with welcoming remarks from the Honorable Francis Affronti. He quotes former Chief Justice Earl Warren: "Citizenship is a man's basic right for it is nothing less than the right to have rights." I then exercise this right. When my name is announced, I walk down the aisle holding my daughter's hand. Upon receiving my certificate of naturalization, my cheeks become as warm as the examiner's hand. My heart voicelessly sings to the instrumental version of the national anthem playing in the background, as the Honorable Kenneth Fisher of the Supreme Court congratulates me. I look straight into his sincere eyes, holding his hand firmly, and barely say, "It is an honor to be an American citizen." He gives a crooked smile, looks at my daughter and replies, "She is beautiful and she is our future." As I walk back to my seat down the long aisle, a representative of the League of Women Voters hands me a miniature flag and voting information. Of course, my daughter receives the same articles, her face as proud as my own.

Tears stream down my face during the Oath of Allegiance. All these people who

represent different countries were reciting in one voice, ". . . and take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God." Accented voices from the Philippines, Mexico, Middle Eastern, Asian, African, European, and South American countries resonate a proclamation of fulfillment. I am among those who takes this obligation freely, some with and some with out accented speech, but definitely in true confidence.

The Monroe County Clerk continues by clearly announcing through the loud speaker, ". . . if you take this oath in true faith, you are a true citizen of the United States of America. You are not an Italian-American. You are not a Spanish-American. You are not German-American, nor any other kind of hyphenated American. You are an American. There is no prouder title than 'Citizen of the United States of America.' It is now yours. You are an American." I hold my certificate and wave my flag high above all others.

My heart also flies high-- I realize that I had been seeing myself as a Portuguese-American all along-- I even hyphenated my name. Is this wrong? Is this what the Monroe County Clerk meant: that I needed to un-hyphenate myself? After many hours, days, and years I come to the conclusion that *no*, the County Clerk did not mean that I had to undo who I am. Instead, our government means that I must identify myself as an American who takes pride in being a part of what the United States stands for - *one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice and for all*. America celebrates the different cultures of its citizens. This is how our country was founded. My hyphenated name represents the new me. The American me. As a person brought up with Portuguese customs I accept this easily.

The Portuguese have always been readily open to people of other nations and this is how I was raised. It's most likely due to the fact that Portugal's citizens are a "melting pot" of their own. My original ancestry derives from Celtic immigrants, Roman and Germanic settlers, Moors and Jews who were absorbed into the population, and Africans, especially North African Muslims, who influenced our culture. Since the 1960s thousands of blacks from Portugal's former African colonies have moved to Portugal. I am a mixture of all these groups and, therefore, embrace the qualities of all humankind.

This celebration of multiculturalism is evident in our foods, the hospitality and the language of my people. English, Spanish, French, and German is commonly taught. It is customary for me to hear my cousins communicating with friends, peers, and coworkers in more than three languages. On the dinner table of our Portuguese family the cuisine mirrors the spices of the foreign travelers of yester-year. After dinner the Portuguese savors the labor of love that brings the entire family together for a main meal. Portugal's borders tantalizes seafaring traditions of the neighboring countries to reach out and touch the coastal waters. If nothing else, the breezes of North Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia and both Americas blend the aromas of Portugal into a culinary delight.

These intermingling scents unknowingly wrap the people with a sense of generosity. This hospitality extends throughout the countryside with visions of men sharing codfish balls and red wine, with Matt and Calli as hungry tourists on the local train headed to our small town, or women, like my *Tia* Emilia cooking for boarders who are unfamiliar with the local market, or native children playing with vacationers, like my own children, using the language of laughter as they teach them to play an unfamiliar game.

This hospitality is not a courtesy; this is a custom handed down from generation to generation. This is why touching is an important part of greeting one another, because it shows friendship, acceptance and affection. How many times I have been ridiculed or taken the wrong way because I touch, kiss, or affectionately pat someone on the arm? It is the simple things that make the Portuguese celebrate one another, God, and life. It is these simple things that have sometimes separated me from others or had me defend myself to those I felt needed an explanation. Being Portuguese is why I accept the diversity of this American nation as my home, why I commit to continuing to extend a hand of generosity to different ethnic backgrounds, why I vow to be an a loyal American who is sensitive to my neighbor's needs, and why I felt like I needed to become an American citizen.

When I had an opportunity to go to South Africa, I jumped at the chance. It was different than I expected and I thought I would return as a rich man.

It was different not knowing the language, not knowing anything, and working at something I didn't know. Fortunately, we adapted and learned fast. I loved the swimming pools. Joe and I would go swimming and pick up girls. It was hard, but it was a fun time. Sticking together as a family was important and that is what helped us adapt.

It was a good time with a big family.

Nelson Flores, age 58

Homecoming

My father received word that his brother Armando in Primrose, South Africa was dying. We knew that he had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease several years back and my father had worried about him ever since. When my uncle's letter arrived at Christmas, written in illegible, shaky handwriting, we knew that he was getting worse. As my father held the letter, his eyes moistened and his eyebrows furrowed. My father called my aunt and she explained that *Tio Armando* could barely speak, "I think he's dying, Quim," my aunt whispered into the phone to my father. After that phone call, my father wanted to go to see him. However, the thought of returning to South Africa where he and my mother lived for a number of years, was overwhelming for the both of them. Returning to a country that held so many bittersweet emotions for my father, and harbored arduous memories for my mother, became an issue.

I knew that for them to go alone would have been very difficult—they needed emotional support and I was going to be the one to give it. I told my mother that Dad couldn't go alone to face his dying brother and that she needed someone at her side in case the rush of certain memories resurfaced and she became distraught. For my mother, the memories of the crazy get-togethers and good times with family and friends, seem to be overshadowed by despondency, cultural differences and hard work. For my father, hiding oppression despite the country's beauty, colors his memories.

Apartheid was something that my father could not overlook and my mother could not live with. My father became politically aware of the way the South African

government was treating its people and it made him uncomfortable. I am told that my father would buy black families and let them live with us in their own private quarters in the backyard and after a few months would give them a traveling pass to go to their real homes for the weekend. Both parties knew that they would not return because my father had given them their freedom. I know that my mother must have been scared for our family's life with this type of behavior, so my father left his electrical company, JoCar, to his partner and returned home to Portugal to begin his journey to America, never to return to South Africa unless there was peace among all its people.

This is the kind of human being my father is: small man with a big presence. The combination of his curly hair and hazel eyes can melt your heart in an instant. When he walks into a room, respect follows him. His charisma demands this because he is founded on honor, loyalty, and compassion. Along with many other people, I once feared him, maybe because his sense of authority was too intense and I wouldn't know how to cope if I disappointed him.

Now I can't imagine fearing him; I can only love him. This is not the love that I have for my mother, that easy companionship, *I have to see you every day* type of love, but a profound *I don't know what I would do without you* kind of love. My parents are my best friends. There isn't anything I wouldn't do for them. This is the way of our Portuguese family. My aunt took care of my ailing grandmother twenty-four hours a day without a thought of any other option.

The year I took my son, then 4-years-old, and went to Portugal to see my grandmother with my parents, I was in a state of wonderment watching my

Tia Emilia tend to the needs of my grandmother, who had a cerebral stroke and was unable to talk, chew, or kiss my father, her golden child. *Tia Emilia* would do little things for her like mash her favorite fresh strawberries with cream and feed her, like all other meals, with a two-inch-diameter feeding syringe. The elderly are highly respected and a part of the daily family unit. Because of that, sacrifices are made; lives are changed to accommodate an aging parent in the home.

It is with this conviction that I was brought up and it is with this conviction that I too will take care of my own family, including my parents. That's why, when I sensed the dilemma about going to see my *Tio Armando* in South Africa, I knew that I had to be there in order to support my parents, at whatever cost--financially or professionally.

So, after many days of discussing it, we agreed that since the country was stable, I offered to accompany them. Besides, I told them that it would be an opportunity of a lifetime to go back and see my birthplace. I took only my daughter with me because it would have been a financial hardship for all four of us to go. I rationalized that my son, being sixteen, could remain home with his father. I had seen my family who resides in South Africa many times in Portugal, but to actually see them there was a dream come true.

I held my daughter's hand on the airplane. I was finally going to my home that built its walls on oral stories and small, tiny glimpses of a child's mind view. In the few photographs that my mother has of the time we lived in South Africa, there is one of me near an archway that led guests into the backyard. It was white with red, yellow, and pink miniature roses that peeked in and out of the latticework. I also remember being happy and secure enough in that neighborhood to walk down the street to the park without an

adult, and hearing my alarmed mother yell my name while she looked for me.

What I don't remember is leaving. I have always felt like I never dealt with leaving my home in Primrose. Whenever my cousins saw me in Portugal, they would tickle me and say, "Here is our real South African." Well, now I was about to find out what my home really looked like and how I really felt about it. I held my daughter's hand tighter.

My father was right, South Africa *is* beautiful. In Cape Town, the gleaming white concrete colonial homes clustered on the edge of where the mountain meets the ocean are spectacular. In Johannesburg, the people mirror its diverse surroundings. White South Africans' blond hair and blue or green eyes glisten with the clear blue skies on the horizon. Black South Africans' colorful attire and dark brown or pitch-black eyes dance to the natural rhythm of the countryside. I saw South Africa through the eyes of a rich white man; kitchens with dark green granite and refrigerators full of food. I saw South Africa through the eyes of a poor white man; filthy clothes and no work. I saw South Africa through the eyes of a rich black man; three piece suits and a BMW in the driveway. I saw South Africa through the eyes of a poor black man; homes made of tin walls and cardboard roofs.

But what made the trip even more notable and forthcoming was seeing South Africa through my *Tio Armando's* eyes. After we arrived, we went to see him immediately. My aunt, *Tia Fernanda*, greeted us with smiles that turned into sobs and hugs that became a clutch of wretchedness. She escorted us to a room in the back of the house where *Tio Armando's* makeshift bedroom was. She led us in, and as we entered, her demeanor changed immediately. "Armando, you have company today!" she exclaimed to him, smiling and fixing his collar. His gaze moved from side to side until it finally riveted

on my father. *Tio Armando* was sitting in a wheelchair, with his shaking hands tangled in knots; his legs tensed into a permanent position that even if you removed the chair, he would remain. His dark hair was freshly combed back and his face was stricken with pain.

My aunt continued, "Remember, Armando, that I have been telling you that your brother Quim was coming to see you?" No answer. She began stroking his hand and said, "Armando, he is here, he came to see you." She motioned for my father to come closer. I couldn't stop looking into my uncle's eyes--they moistened just like my father's that day that he'd held his letter. *Tia Fernanda* looked up at my father and softly said, "I didn't want you to worry, but he hasn't spoken in three months."

My father bent over and in a trembling voice said, "Armando my brother, it is I, Quim." He then held his hands and kissed his cheek. *Tio Armando* began shaking even more and opened his mouth wide. "I know," he cried, stretching his words out as if to say this is the only time I will be able to speak to you, brother. Everyone gasped and I started to cry. *Tia Fernanda* kissed him and praised him for his effort. That was the only time he spoke, but his eyes told us what we needed to know every day that we sat with him.

* * * * *

June 3, 1964, was a day of mesmerizing joy. The first sparkling snowfall in decades baptized not only the developing city of Primrose, South Africa, but also the infant daughter born to a Portuguese couple. My mother says I was born with wide dark brown-eyes. Ready to see the world. My father says I was born with the best pair of lungs. The world will definitely hear my words. My parents, while living in South Africa, remained Portuguese citizens and naturalized my brother and me as such. Moving back to Portugal, as a toddler, where my parents and extended family raised me and where my sister was born, was the beginning of how our way of life was nurtured.

I cannot remember much of my birthplace of South Africa. I do remember my father deliberately describing each occurrence. One of my favorite anecdotes is when we left South Africa on a cruise boat to Portugal. This wasn't one of the cruise ships of today, with all the amenities and leisure activities on board. There wasn't a formal dining room or inviting swimming pool, or disco halls to dance the night away. There was a mess hall to eat our meager meals as the plates slid across the tables according to the rhythm of the waves.

My father would begin this recurring tale at every opportunity when all of us children were together. He would encourage us to gather around him and he would begin by reminding us all of how easily I would become bored and how quickly I was to explore at my young age of three. "Caci thought that the ocean was a swimming pool," he would affirm in an amusing coarse voice. My father flicked back his head and let out a chuckle as he told us that I had wanted to go swimming. He continued his story, as we all huddled around his chair, and in a whispered voice said, "your mom and me were distracted for some forgotten reason, and Caci began climbing the railing along the boat's gunwale." I

thought it was time to go swimming and I didn't realize, in my childishness, that I terrified everyone around me, including the crew.

My family and I all laughed, not a surprise kind of laughter, but a special familiar laughter that lingered as he finished with details of my rescue. Similarly, we always lingered at the oval shaped dining table or our round kitchenette table on Sundays to chat, debate, tell jokes, or listen to old and new stories. It's a Portuguese custom to sit at the dinner table for a least two hours, but with my family it was more of a way of life--a way of sustaining fortitude for the Flores because we only had each other.

Sundays we sat from one-thirty to four o'clock in the afternoon and on special holidays like Christmas Eve, we would sit at a makeshift table of three smaller tables and a ping pong table from seven o'clock in the evening to four in the morning. Oh, on those nights my mother would especially shine. Having all the uncles, aunts, and cousins to reminisce about the old days is a treasured treat. I absorbed all the explicit elements; I especially loved hearing about South African parties that my parents gave at their home.

* * * * *

My mother would always take a big gulp of wine from her ruby glass goblet when she began to tell about the shenanigans of the "boys" and the companionship of the "girls." My mother has dark-brown, almost black hair, parted on the side, combed back above her ears in a short timeless style. She has the fresh sunny scent of laundry dried on the

clothesline, and most of the time she wears her apron to the table. But when she tells this story, I visualize her in the black-and-white pictures that are scattered around our home or tucked away in weathered envelopes: a slim-figured young woman with a waist that you could wrap your hands around, wearing a tight-fitting collared floral dress with a wide belt and a flouncing knee-length skirt. Her wavy, almost curly, short dark hair that accentuated her eyes, and a smile that dazzled even when she wasn't looking into the camera. When she did, the beauty mark on her upper lip lit up, making her look like a 1940s Hollywood movie star or, as the whole family agrees, Jacqueline Kennedy.

She would start laughing even before she would begin the story of how she had the entire batch of brothers and sisters and friends over for a Saturday night dinner and how they all ate, and ate, and ate, but how they drank *Catamba*, a drink made of cola and wine, even more and, as the night progressed, so did the tall stories and how the gags began.

Noticing all of our reactions around the table, my mother would become excited and sits up. One hand supports her up on the edge of the table and the other flies around as she gives a visual of how one of my young uncles got the garden hose from the backyard, roped it down the porch, through the window and into the living room. My father is in stitches, hunched over his plate and we all know what's next, but we still have that look of anticipation in our eyes. In her comical voice she explains how my uncle hosed down my father and his best friend, Valente, because they had pissed their drawers and needed a shower. This is how the South African festivities began. The girls--my mother, aunts and friends--would all scatter around screaming like caged monkeys and my mother would go into detail of how it took all of them into the wee hours to calm down and grudgingly go home or up to bed.

My mother took care of and lived with twelve men, some my father's brothers, others close friends, and she also took care of two small children; my brother and me, just three years apart. Her days in South Africa consisted of a lot of cleaning, picking up and cooking, but she found joy in those evenings where laughter was the main course, and bonding was dessert. She settles back in her chair shaking her head, and softly says that it didn't matter how much work it took the next day to clean up because the memory made her smile through the whole process of scrubbing, wiping, and sweeping.

* * * * *

On the afternoon that we left our *Tio Armando*, we stood in front of the house where all those memories took place thirty-five years ago and my mother wept. "I did love this house," she let out between sighs. I looked at my father and he nodded. We stood there staring at *our* house that now was a broken down image of just a house; the front garden that grows vividly in my recollections was dried up—dirt and weeds everywhere and a makeshift garage had replaced the arch that I remembered with its smell of trellis roses. I felt like weeping too. Instead, I grabbed the camera and asked my cousin to take a picture. When I look at that photograph of my mother, my father, my daughter and I standing in front of the first home I ever lived in, I think of the American saying, "home is where the heart is" and to me that means home is where my family is.

“Life is very difficult for any person that leaves the family nest and travels thousands of miles to another part of the world.

In my case, I had to face a totally different culture and new language. Sadness in my heart never ended; tears in my eyes were plentiful.

Since the day that I had to say goodbye to my friends, to my brothers and sisters, to my dear father, and to be taken by force from the arms of my beloved mother, I suffered. As

I was taken away, I could hear the loud cries,

‘Goodbye my son, I will see you no more!’ Long time after, thousands of miles away, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and even today in this beautiful country, I still hear these sorrowful words.”

Joaquim M. Flores, age 67

Influential Family

There are more stories that I remember, some are much too frightening, or sad, to hear them unfold according to my father or mother. But other accounts continue to unfurl in the voice of my own thoughts. One occurred when I was living in Portugal. Even though I know my mother had told me of the time when I took a package of my favorite shortbread cookies from my grandmother's kitchen and hid in the alley to eat them so I wouldn't have to share with my brother or cousins, I can see my own version of it happening. I know I was only four and probably too young to have any recollection, but I clearly remember the cement block alley; I can feel the sweaty tears running down my cheeks as I squinted against the sun to see who was coming; I can hear my great aunt's, *Tia Nanes*, footsteps echoing through the yard as the sterile scent of her reached my nose before she did. I faintly remember the words of comfort whispered in my ears while I sat on her lap on the concrete floor sharing a biscuit with her.

Tia Nanes was an extraordinary woman who has helped mold my personality. I was told that she became engaged to the love of her life and that upon his death, only months before the wedding, she took a vow of celibacy that would last for the rest of her life. She never did marry and lived with her sister, my grandmother, *Avó Laura*, until her death in 1992. *Tia Nanes* was a strong woman with long gray hair pulled back into a twisted bun. She had my mother's smile; wide with lips parted, and my grandmother's round eyes. She wore solid black out of respect to her fiancé with the exception of various patterned dark-colored aprons. She was a midwife and nurse to the poor and needy. This is why I describe her scent as sterile: she smelled like a hospital or doctor's

office, when you're about to take a shot, and the whiff of the medication in the syringe, along with the alcohol, reaches your nostrils. *Tia* Nanes would give vaccines to the homebound sick, soup to the hungry, and Communion to the disabled. She went to daily Mass and prayed for peace, for the sins of others, and for each and every one of us in the family. Doctors respected her, and dishonest merchants feared her. She was a force to be reckoned with and had a penchant for politeness. We loved *Tia* Nanes because she wasn't afraid of life's misfortunes and somehow also made everyone around her fearless.

She taught me how to speak my mind and stand up for what I believed in, I think of her every time I start to pull away from uncomfortable situations and need the strength to confront. She taught me what community work is really about—even today I am involved with the 19th Ward as a volunteer and work as a teacher in the inner city of Rochester, New York. She taught me how to commit myself to God as a Roman Catholic, this commitment is about never losing or questioning our faith, which is different from the inner spirituality that my parents and maternal grandmother fostered in me.

The last time I saw my maternal grandmother, *Avó* Laura, she placed a saint card in my one hand and a barrette that she always wore in her hair in the other. She told me that the angels would always be with me and to never fear the challenges that lay ahead, because I am not alone. She sat propped against the headboard of a large, dark mahogany four-poster bed, with layers of blankets pushed to her waist. Her white hair was pulled back in a braided bun with thin wisps framing her wrinkled face. My *Avó* Laura had the widest, roundest brown eyes I ever saw. As a child I would stare deep into them while she prayed with me and I would feel like I was floating, floating above the room, peaceful, so peaceful. When we were done praying, she would close her eyes and say that she was

tired, and I would place my head on her lap as she leaned back in her chair and ask me to tell her things about America. So, in the same calmness, I told her about Christmas with snow falling all around us, or how we swam in lakes with no waves during the summer and man-made beaches, while she slowly shook her head in disbelief.

I did the same with my paternal grandmother, *Avó Ziquera*. When we visited Portugal during the summer months, we stayed at her house, where my father was raised. My *Avó Ziquera* would get up early in the morning and make coffee. I always awoke to the aroma of espresso beans and warm milk. I would skitter down the courtyard stairs and sit up on the table bench. She would wobble out of the kitchen and smile at me. What a good granddaughter I was, she would exclaim each morning, and there we would sit together.

She would cut a thick slab of freshly baked bread and spread quince *marmelada*, over it in one smooth stroke. I would bite into it while I closed my eyes savoring each mouthful. I would dunk the last bite into the *galão*, a coffee-and-milk mixture, and lick my lips and wipe my chin. When I looked up at her, she would return my gaze and wipe her chin too; we both smiled.

She had short, wavy dark-brown hair, just like my father's, and a round face and body that made you want to pinch her cheeks and hug her all the time. She too wore dark clothes in honor of my grandfather's premature death. Then our chats would begin. She would tell me about how cute my father was as a child, how proud everyone in Póvoa was of him, and how she would cry for him out of longing when he left for the States. My *Avó Ziquera* called my father her "golden child" and loved him with such a fierce love. I was too young back then to appreciate this, but on the day in my late twenties, when I saw my

father say goodbye to her for the last time, I recognized the significance of a son and mother's love. As my father held her lethargic body and cried tears of pain, I looked at my own son sitting next to me and vowed to give him that same kind of devotion.

After I got married and had to say good bye to my parents at the airport as they embarked on their annual journey to Portugal, I cried for days. It was so hard knowing that I wouldn't see them for months, that I wouldn't be able to sit on the couch or at the table and talk with them for hours, that I wouldn't be able to give them a simple hug or a quick kiss. I was afraid that they had had enough of America and that they would call and say that they were staying in Portugal. But, they came back, each time with eager smiles and happiness in their eyes to see my children and me. Now I know that they will be back and I don't cry for days, but I can only conceive of how it must have been for them to say goodbye to their own mothers and fathers during the early years, especially when they didn't know when they would be back or, in the case of my grandmothers, knew they were saying good bye as they were dying and would never see them again.

When I left Portugal to come to the States, I do remember my mother saying, "*Adeus Portugal, até próxima*" as she waved through the airplane window. Whenever we went back on vacation, we always said, "*Adeus Portugal, até próxima*" as we waved from the airplane window. As I got older and became bilingual along with my children, I too would wave from the window with them and say "*Adeus Portugal, até próxima - Goodbye Portugal, until next time.*" We not only said goodbye to our family and friends, but we always said farewell to our home, our land, our nation.

“When I first arrived here I felt sad, I felt nervous, I felt like crying, I felt like a stranger and it was so hard to get used to this . . . Linda was a baby and I felt like I couldn’t take care of her because I didn’t know were to get t he things she needed . . . I always wanted to stay in the kitchen because the house was so different from the houses in Portugal and I wouldn’t go into the other rooms . . . I always had to have my children around me. I needed them around me.

Fatima Flores, age 67

Greeted by Darkness

Similarly to those laughs that prolonged our evenings or Sunday dinners, my tears lingered for days as I heard my mother describe our arrival into our new country. It was 1968 and all I knew was that Daddy had bought us a big house in America.

My mother, brother Tony, baby sister Linda, and I flew on our first jet to Canada. We were supposed to land in Toronto, meet my father, and drive to Rochester. For some reason the airplane had to land in Montreal. My father wasn't in sight; my mother was confused as we deplaned. My recollection is of her holding my sister; clutching her like a two-year-old clutches her baby doll. I also have this vision of my mother standing at the top of the escalator at the airport with my sister in her arms, my brother holding on to her coattails with one hand and holding a large bag with the other, and with me in front of her with my Portuguese doll dangling from my tired hands.

My mother explains that we cautiously stepped onto the escalator and in an instant our world turned into a nightmare. I didn't know that you couldn't put your hands on the sidewall; I was too small to reach the handrail and so I placed my hand below the rail for support. I instantly fell forward and began to tumble down the metal stairs. I remember hearing my mother screaming and my sister crying in reaction. In a split second I felt like my head would explode and as I tried to look up, my head snapped back and the steel stairs pushed my left cheek closer to the end of the escalator, as it slowly ate strands of my hair. Out of nowhere a large hand grabbed me by the arm and lifted me to my feet as I neared the bottom step that was about to swallow all of my waist-length hair. I stood there stunned. I couldn't understand what the man was saying, and my mother was crying

and couldn't hold me because she was still carrying my sister. Tony just stood there looking at me with a blank, scared stare, and my head was throbbing. This is how America welcomed us.

That horrible night in Montreal's airport did come to an end: My father rerouted us to Toronto, and met us at the gate, hugging us on his knees without words. My mother says that I lost more than some of my hair that day: she says I also lost some of my vigor. I was very spunky in South Africa and in Portugal. I was always running to a family member who spoiled me after I did something I shouldn't have. My mother would always say, "After that escalator incident in the airport, Caci began to remain by my side along with Tony and Linda, and you would think that she became shy." This behavior became very apparent to me when we were deported to Toronto. We did not stay in our new home in Rochester for very long because an extension for our visas was denied. We had no choice but to return to Toronto and apply there for a temporary Canadian Visa, while my father continued to apply for a permanent visa in the U.S.A. We were accepted for a Canadian visa and my father arranged for us to stay there with a Portuguese family.

Senhor Pedro was a wonderful, caring and jovial man. His family offered a needed kindness for our achy and tired psyches. To stay with people who spoke our language, ate our food, and danced to our music, eased the anxiety of having to start all over again and mostly it eased the longing that my family had for our home in Portugal. Toronto has a small suburb made up of a large Portuguese community. There are Portuguese deli shops, jewelers, bakeries, grocery stores, and restaurants. To walk in a grocery store and buy a two-pound bag of whole sardines for grilling, a couple links of homeland sausage, and a can of Portuguese olives was astonishing to us. In addition, the schools had bilingual

programs for students with Portuguese as a first language. I was placed in a second-grade bilingual classroom and had the support of my first language through my teacher. It was the first time that I didn't walk to school with stomach aches or throbbing headaches caused by an unfamiliar language. You would think that this would have made our lives happier or somehow better. But in reality it was the wrong move at the wrong time and that blissful feeling lasted only momentarily.

Senhor Pedro helped us find an apartment on Dundas Street next door to a park. This new home was not one of my favorite places that I lived in during those years of travel. It was a single-family home and the owners had converted the second floor and attic into small apartments. There wasn't a private entrance for the two other families that resided there. It always bothered me to enter the house while the owners living on the main floor were watching TV in the living room and we had to say *Hello* to them as we walked up the stairs or when we were eating in our compact kitchenette and the couple living in the attic would come up *our stairs* in order to reach their living space. But this is not what bothered me the most--it was the depression that moved in with us that *really* bothered me.

The apartment never seemed to have a light on. Because his job was in Rochester, New York, my father came to see us only on weekends. So this left my mother by herself going through cultural shock, becoming despondent and overwhelmed with having to deal with all the daily duties alone, *again*. She had frequent migraine headaches and needed to lie down often. Yet she never let us out of her sight. At first we didn't want to leave her side because she always had that scared look in her eyes, so we were afraid too. My brother Tony was trying to figure out whether he should even bother making new friends

and if he could somehow be a caregiver for my mother. He sat with her and would volunteer to keep us occupied.

Tony would take us for walks in the park. We lived in the last house on the street and adjacent to a park that had a twisty slide we thought was as high as the Empire State Building. When I went back as an adult I couldn't believe how small the slide really was. Tony would also take us sledding in the winter, helping my mother bundle my sister and me in hand-me-down snowsuits, one size too small. But no matter what my brother did to entertain us, my sister Linda, who was only about a year old, cried all the time, regardless. But, now that I think of it, I constantly cried in Canada too.

When our temporary U.S. visa had expired and my father packed us up and drove us the long four hours back to Toronto, I never stopped crying. There I stood at those familiar stairs holding my bubblegum-pink suitcase in my hand and my Portuguese doll in the crook of my arm, watching my father kiss my brother on the forehead, asking him to help out. He held my baby sister and he took in the scent of her baby-powdered neck. He handed her over to my mother, knelt down in front of me and whispered, "I'll be back on Friday night." My eyes refused to let the tears escape. I blinked and my eyes stung. I cried out, "Daddy!" as he got up. He lifted me and held me. I kept his arms around me for the whole week, because in Canada I constantly cried, and feeling his arms around me helped me fall asleep at night. After that second move we always played in silence. We always ate in silence. We always were one room away from my mother, if not in the same room. This habit took years to change.

When we finally settled in Rochester, we weren't allowed to go over to our friends house or do sleepovers until we were much older. I was eighteen when I finally had my

first sleepover and that was because it was at Jackie's house--a Portuguese family. I realize that during that time period we were hardened by the various moves from one country to another and our scared little family, unbeknownst to us, was christened into a new way of life.

America's culture baptizes first-generation immigrants as "off the boat." I am of that first generation that washed up on the shore of Ellis Island. Theoretically, typical characteristics of this generation are persons of 50 years of age and older, with accented language and other stereotypes. To everyone's surprise, I break this mold. I am in my late thirties, speak fluent Portuguese and English, have a deep sense of my culture, have two bilingual children and recently have become an American citizen. Being off the boat in the early seventies has shaped who I am today.

The spontaneous and rebellious consciousness of that era, along with the traditional and conservative customs of my family, created a lifelong journey that molded my identity. I am a woman from a generation of "acculturation" and I survived total assimilation. Luckily my parents combated their generation's "fear of the stranger" and were able to encourage the beliefs of today and reinforce the values of yesterday. It wasn't easy for them to use courage as a temporary home, while anguish knocked on the door asking to come in. The nights that I sat on the hardwood floor leaning against my mother's leg with my cheek resting on her lap as she meticulously caressed my forehead and controlled her sobs, is a murky memory. This grief for the loss of family, language, food, and spirituality is a widespread process of the desire to find a sense of familiarity and prosperity.

These associations began to weave a new life for my family and we tied ourselves

to a common thread in the tapestry of an immigrant Portuguese family. This thread of hope consists of communal support, constant praise, heartfelt thankfulness, and unremitting faith. The yearning for our country calls us in a whisper and wakes us from our dreamlike state of seclusion. This longing focuses on the ability to be patient and when the time finally comes and wipes the tears away, gives us hope that tomorrow will bring better days. This foundation is the outcome of seeking others similar to our cultural ways, breaking that wall of isolation and rejection, and ultimately rebuilding our self-assurance. The result of our efforts was and is what makes up the home we found when we finally were granted a permanent visa in the United States: the Portuguese American Association, Saint Augustine Church, and the nearby homes that shelter other Portuguese families and traditions in Rochester, New York. These means were and still are what continues to give my family the courage and faith to endure our new life instead of looking back to our old one.

“Our guardian angel was Mary Abreu, a wonderful Portuguese woman who took us all under her wing. She purchased winter coats, did registration at different schools for all ten children, and took us grocery shopping because we had no car. She was a positive role model who shared and gave without receiving anything in return. She made us strong believers in the good of people.”

Marcelina Campa, age 41

American Grandparents

The 19th Ward in Rochester, New York, became my family's surrogate homeland. We adjusted to all that was new. There was no calming ocean that called your name morning, day, and night; there was no corner café that beckoned us for a leisurely after-dinner walk; there was no bakery down the street that housed the crusty rolls shaped like a duck's bill to be slathered with marmalade for breakfast, or the traditional miniature egg custard cups that melted in your mouth for a mid-afternoon snack; there was no butcher around the bend that knew you by name and what particular fresh cut you needed on a given day. There was no one walking the cobblestone streets greeting one another, creating a community where everyone knew everyone. Instead there was a YMCA across the street that echoed with unfamiliar names during business hours; there was a corner deli that housed unusual items to purchase, like bags of potato chips and sliced yellow American cheese; there was the Arnett library down the street that shelved books in a foreign language out of reach for our emergent fingers; there was a Bells market around the bend that had packaged, cellophane-wrapped meats stacked in cold units for self-service. But there was the elderly childless couple next door who acknowledged us with a smile and welcomed us to our newfound community.

Mr. and Mrs. Guyer became our American grandparents. They owned the double family home next door and lived on the far-left side facing the street. Mr. Guyer was a handsome man with caramel-colored hair who loved to kiss women. My mother very early on established a handshake routine for daily greetings. She giggles when she talks about this even today, because in our culture we all greet by kissing, so this became an

inside joke between the two of them. He would patter around the back yard in his bikini bathing suit, pulling his lawn chair with him to find the right spot for sunbathing. If he wasn't in the sun, Mr. Guyer was at the YMCA across the street. There he was either raising funds in the offices or swimming in the steamy basement pool.

Mrs. Guyer was our guardian angel. She wore her pale yellow hair in two braids that criss-crossed in the back of the neck, swung up and around her head, and fastened by two small combs. This braided crown looked more like a halo to my young eyes. When she smiled, light seemed to fill the space where she stood. Her voice was gentle and soothing. She always found a way to communicate with us by avoiding the hardship, embarrassment, or frustration that we were always faced with.

As a childless couple, Mr. and Mrs. Guyer took my parents under their wings and nurtured their grandbabies--Tony, Linda, and myself--with pride. Mr. Guyer familiarized us with the YMCA and had my father sign us up for swim lessons. All three of us went on Saturday mornings, rain or shine, snow or freezing weather. This gave us a sense of community and it was like crossing the street to our ocean back in Portugal. I always brought a nickel and bought a bag of barbequed potato or salt and vinegar potato chips, or a giant pretzel rod at the entrance desk. Mr. Guyer lent my father tools and lawn equipment to use and sang Italian operas at the Sunday table that reminded us of the Portuguese *fados*. These sometimes sad Portuguese songs are destiny stories of love-stricken couples and are the embodiment of what romance means to a Portuguese person.

We were love-stricken with Mrs. Guyer. She introduced shopping to my mother. She patiently explained what the names of certain labels or food items were at the Bells market. She would take my mother, my sister and me on the city bus downtown. We

would walk through Midtown Plaza holding hands, looking at the Hummel's peeking in and out as they went round and round, and eating lunch at places like the top of the Sibley's Tower. I would try grilled cheese sandwiches at her suggestion and she would order egg salad sandwiches for my sister, because she knew that eggs were a staple in our midday meal and that eggs were and still are my sister's favorite. I can still see her affable eyes peeking around the menu at us as she went over it with my mother.

Mrs. Guyer always knew when to "just stop over." It seemed that whenever my mother was having a bad day, Mrs. Guyer would walk up our driveway, and ask if my brother, sister and I would like to sit outside under the grapevines that my father grew and listen to a story. We all looked at my mother and knew that the look of thanks in her eyes meant that it was okay. We would follow Mrs. Guyer out to the patchy grass under the grapevines and she would pull a blanket over the clothesline that ran from the corner pole and along the edge of the vines; this created a tent of sorts. She sat on a little stool that she had tucked under her arm with the book. Those initial humid summer days were filled with her voice reading stories of the *Adventures of the Bobsey Twins*, or the *Nancy Drew* or *Hardy Boys* mysteries. She opened the world of books to me and, even though I couldn't read in those first years, I listened and understood. Soon I inched my way to the edge of her lap and eventually stood next to her and watched as she pointed to the words as she read them aloud. Those moments were so significant to me because they gave me the confidence that one day I too would be able to read and write in this foreign language.

Other than story time with Mrs. Guyer one of the most memorable events of my childhood during that time was searching for my energetic uncle or admirable father as I would cast my youth-size 5 slippers on their adult-size 8 black patent leather shoes. The

thrill of whirling simultaneously to their quickened beat as we danced, surpassed any thought of playing dolls in the next room with my younger cousins.

My family invents reasons for us all to gather and celebrate by eating, storytelling, singing, and most of all dancing. Maybe one of the children passed an exam, or one of the bachelor uncles wanted to introduce a girlfriend, or one of the married aunts was making a typical Portuguese dinner complete with traditional desserts and large enough to feed an army, or maybe one of the elders was turning a significant 70. No matter what the reasons, the afternoons were full of exciting chatter, silverware clicking on porcelain plates, and babies crying for attention. The evenings lingered as we danced with our traditional folk steps that ended in laughter and sweaty hugs. The nights progressed as the younger generation took over the living room's shag-carpeted floor and combined our cultural roots with the up-to-date dances. The "Bump" will never be the same--we would extend our arms high above our heads in Portuguese folk tradition and barely touch our hips to seductively suggest a bruise, in the current American era.

* * * * *

My father had brought over four uncles from Portugal: Assis, José, Nelson. They lived with us for the first few years after our arrival. This was a time of mixed emotions. For one, it gave us the sense of family that we had been aching for. Having my uncles in and out of the house, sitting at the dinner table telling stories, watching *Star Trek* on Saturday evenings and going to church with us, livened our days and nights. It was like we were in Portugal. On the other hand, my mother was once again taking care of an extended family. This became a continued hardship for her. She had to do all their laundry, pick up after them, and cook dinners that fed us all. My mother never complained, I think because she needed them as much as they needed her.

My parents, in addition to taking care of their three children, also had to deal with Assis, the “Bump King,” a 16-year-old heart throb who had aspirations to become a hippy who attended the University of Rochester. He ended up married to an all-American Californian blue eyed-blond. José, the “Trickster,” who was loved by all the guys and gals and who would bring them all home for an impromptu party, captured the heart of a pretty Italian girl in Schenectady, New York. Nelson, the quiet, handsome brother, would take my brother and me to the park to pick up women. He ended up marrying a respectable Portuguese girl who loved to keep a clean house. My parents became their parents. They enforced the same rules with them that they did when I was a teenager. They supported them when they went to college, moved away, or got married. These brothers became sons to my parents and these uncles became my brothers.

Even years later, when my father brought over his brother Carlos’s family of six, my parents demonstrated paternal qualities. My father and mother rented a home near us, cleaned it, and furnished it for them. They helped them register my four cousins at school

and insisted that I help them with the language and homework. My mother and father did this not out of obligation, but out of love, respect, and kindness. This made them happy. My parents always seemed to keep the belief that family is the core of happiness and that we should rejoice in one another regularly.

I do not recall seeing my father as much as I wanted to on the weekends because he regularly sought overtime at his General Motors job. Despite the long hours at work, he always managed to create special memories. The toboggan rides at Mendon Ponds Park with *Tio* Joe and *Tio* Assis. Swimming at Hamlin Beach on Sundays with my cousins and eating grilled meats marinated in paprika, garlic, olive oil, and other spices that my mother brought along and cooked while we played. French-fries at Carroll's with just the five of us. Our weekly walks before Sunday dinner. My father brought stories, along with snowmen, in the midst of unexpected, freezing snowstorms.

He also managed to give me unconditional support when English was more than just another language. Just when I thought it was impossible to learn this second vocabulary in school, my father would place his hand on my shoulder and say, "It's okay Caci, speak to me in English and continue speaking Portuguese to your mother. This way you will practice your English and never forget your traditional language." He knew somehow, how frightened I was of losing something so familiar in this unknown land. I thanked him silently as I drifted off to sleep at night.

*"Snow is very pretty and we had lots of it growing up--
I remember one morning we got to stay home because
there was snow up past the kitchen door and
Daddy asked me to go outside and see how deep it was,
so he opened up the door and Daddy let me slide out
the top of the door and I dug a hole back to the kitchen door.
We had to walk many, many blocks with
snow past our heads so we had many frostbites.
Now, I like snow, as long as I am inside.
But the ocean and the beach is home."*

Laurinda Flores O'Connell, age 36

Frigid Disposition

When I awoke in the mornings during those early years in Rochester, the air that I inhaled was cold and moist, I did not want to get out from under the covers of my warm, cozy twin bed. I knew my mother was about to give me another wakeup reminder and tried really hard to convince myself that it really wasn't that cold. I pulled my feet out first while holding onto the blankets and slipped my cold toes into the slippers left at my bedside. I went straight to the bathroom and cleaned up until my mother joined me to fix my hair. She did my hair until I was at least twelve because I kept it long enough to touch my bottom. She would plait my hair into two thick braids on the weekdays for school like Laura Ingalls and up in a French braid on the weekends for church or family get togethers. She would remind me to put on an extra undershirt, kiss me on the cheek and tell me to hurry and come down for breakfast.

My brother and I would start out for school after a glass of orange juice, a *galloña*, and some toast. When my mother opened the back door and I saw the tall drifts of snow creeping up the back porch stairs, I would freeze in the doorway. Tony would pull me out into the weather that I was learning to dislike so much and I would look back at my mother in the doorway, hoping that she would let us stay home. She rarely did—only if my father told her that he had heard on the radio that city schools were closed. I still pray for snow days. I still have a hard time swallowing the cold air of January and having to put on layers of clothing for six months of the year.

It didn't seem to bother my brother as we walked the mile to school because of how patient he was with me. As the snowflakes fell on our woolen hats, and the winter

chill slithered up our winter coats, I would *whine*. After just a few blocks, when I couldn't feel my toes I would stand still and refuse to take another step. I would stare at the wall of snow that bordered the sidewalk and pretend not to see what Tony would do as he walked on. I watched him out of the corner of my eye. He would look back when he realized I wasn't behind him and slowly walk back to me. He never got angry. He never yelled at me. Instead, he would place his hand on my shoulder and give me encouragement. His words were lost in the echoes of the screeching early morning winds, but his tender eyes that peeked above the dark blue scarf wrapped around his face melted my frozen disposition. I took his gloved hand and together we made the treacherous walk to school.

Once there, my temperament did not change. I was encircled by another language, ignored by my teacher and peers, and bored out of my mind. Since our arrival in February we moved back and forth from Canada and Rochester the rest of the winter. Even in the early summer, it was impossible to warm up during those frigid mornings during elementary school.

As a result I began to count the summers. My father had said that in three years we would go back to Portugal for a full month's visit and, "God willing," we would go every third summer after that. This meant that this was going to be my first full summer in our new big house and I had to count two more before I could go to Portugal. My mother called our house the "Cowboy House" because it had a long wooden veranda, shingles instead of stone for siding, and a black-top roof--our home was just like in the cowboy western movies. Even though it took some getting used to, I loved our house. It was my favorite color: green. Over the years it has been every shade of green that

Sherwin Williams stocks This very day it is a mint green with a dark-forest green porch.

We didn't spend very much time on our front porch, but I did have a secret hideout. We had one long flourishing bush that leaned up against and extended the length of the porch. The inside of the bush was hollow, so I made an inconspicuous entryway and spent my summers in my musty dirt floor hide-a-way. I never took any one in there - it was my place to think, write, draw and read. The summer of '75 I read the *Little House on the Prairie* series and *On the Banks of Plum Creek*. I knew exactly that Wilder meant when she described the way her family's home was dug out of the river bank, because that was how it was in my dugout. As Wilder described the earthy scent of her home it became real to me and so did Wilder's struggles to adapt to each of her new surroundings and her perpetual longing for home.

I longed for the beach. In Portugal, we lived across the street from one of the most-visited Atlantic beaches in Europe. The beach itself is approximately 200 yards wide and three miles long. It houses striped cotton cabanas in rows for shade lovers called *barracas*, and coarse sand the color of sun-dried almonds for the sun worshipers. This sand never sticks to your skin or your clothing, so it invites you to lie in it. Every twenty feet where the sand meets the *avenida*, there are tall poles with weatherproof speakers that reverberate music from the local radio station. I loved playing *Prego*, the Portuguese version of tick-tack-toe, but with one long super-sized nail that was flipped up in the air to land on the desired sand-drawn square. As I played with my cousins, I listened to the rhythm of the ocean merging with the rhythm of the music. Even now when I'm in Póvoa and I'm lying on the warm sand after a cool dip, I close my eyes and listen for that special merging murmur.

When growing up, often visiting at Hamlin Beach, Mendon Ponds, and Ontario Beach at Charlotte, I didn't have that unique sound lulling me to the place I call paradise. I heard only the screeching of the sea gulls mingling with the various radios playing in our vicinity--the next best thing. I couldn't wait for Sundays, because that was the only day my father usually had off and we would go to one of the lakeside beaches. My mother would labor all morning cooking, marinating, and packing our food. My brother, sister and I would run around after Mass, collecting our favorite sand toys and recreational items like Frisbees.

After we arrived, the adults unpacked the car while the three of us dashed for the sand: kicking it, and letting it slide between our fingers, and lying down on our stomachs to feel the warmth creep through our tee shirts. We would test the water with our toes and run back to my mother to ask if we could go for a swim. Before she could answer, one of my uncles would pick one of us up over his head and start running to the water with the rest of us screaming from behind.

On one occasion, I took my daughter and her friend Maddy to Charlotte Beach. It has been years since I had visited this "near the city" lake beach. As a child we went once a month, alternating the other weekends with Hamlin Beach State Park and Mendon Ponds Park. But a few years ago my family and I stopped going due to polluted waters and poor park conditions. One Saturday we decided to go and check out the beach because the new *Spirit of Ontario I* ferry had just made itself home in our Rochester port.

It was a calm, hazy, partly sunny day. We picked a spot on the super-fine sand and I laid a large blanket down and got comfortable. I listened to the families talking around me. An Italian suburban family was remarking how they didn't bring water shoes, towels

or bathing suits. “But you said we wouldn't stay long, just to see the ferry,” the husband snapped at his wife. As they let their small children wet their feet, they remarked how nice the park was now and how much it had changed for the better. “Let's come tomorrow all day, kids,” he said.

The small children clapped with delight as another male couple arrived with a year old toddler. Their T-shirts said “Environmental Engineer” and they bobbed the baby in and out of the water. “Let's go home and pack up a few things and come back,” one of the guys said while the child plopped itself on the sand and began digging with its petite fingers. These conversations made me think of how I always say, “Let's come back,” when I am in Portugal because reluctantly we had to leave the beach to meet family for a late lunch, I ended up leaving everything in the *barraca* saying, “Lets come back.”

The voices brought me back to Lake Ontario. We were all congregated by the “End of Beach Patrol” sign closest to the pier. I got up as the couple began to leave and walked west along the water's edge. Past the first life guard chair, a Puerto Rican family laughed as they ran in and out of the water. Hearing their Spanish, that shares some basic vocabulary found in Portuguese, made me smile. Further down, past the second lifeguard chair, a game of beach volleyball was going on. I paused and watched briefly. Then turned, walked back to my area, took a dip and lay back on the blanket.

I have come full circle. I think of being on the beach in Póvoa again--I got up as the couple next to our *barraca* began to leave and went for a walk, west along the water's edge. Past the first lifeguard chair, a group of tourists sat alongside their windbreaks laughing and speaking French, Swiss, and Spanish. Recognizing each language by its dialect again made me smile. Further down, past the second lifeguard chair, along the

edge of the ocean waves were body surfers and young adults playing paddleball. I again paused and watched briefly. Then turned, walked back to my area, took a dip and lay back on the blanket.

Where there is water and sand, I am home.

“As a young immigrant, a defining moment in my tradition from Portugal to the United States of America was during my high school years at Jefferson. Having arrived without speaking English and having difficulty assimilating into this new culture, I was fortunate to have an extremely dedicated group of teachers, family, neighbors, and friends, support and guide me. When I was asked to represent Jefferson in a citywide event for all of the Rochester-area high schools, as its flag bearer, I was somewhat surprised. When I walked the main aisle toward the imposing stage of East High School’s auditorium while holding the American flag as high as I could, I felt an enormous pride and honor. It was at that moment that I knew that I had arrived in my new country.”

Fernando Silva, age 40

Portuguese Diva

My mid-to-late teenage years in the late 1970s required a balancing act that was difficult, daunting, and sometimes devastating. Most of the children of European immigrants found themselves torn between the customs of their parents and the world in which they sought affirmation. I was among the “generation of acculturation,” that is, the generation of persons who often experience together the results of the conflict of different sets of rules, roles, and defined relationships. I am the by-product of a generation changed by conflicting value systems along with a denial of self-identity. I have survived this conflict of the heart, the mind, and the soul. I also survived this cross-cultural conflict at school.

My classmates ripped my personality to shreds in junior high. There were days when I thought I would never be able to get above water. The indifferent student laughing at my foreign clothes, the other ethnic groups blurting out racial remarks at me as I walked by. In an attempt to figure out where I stood socially, I ended up an outcast; I felt alone. On top of it all, the teachers ignored me because they didn't know how to reach or teach me. Seventh and eighth grades were a time of dark memories. I choose the ones that I think of vaguely, like Danny's first peck on the lips as we walked with Julia to her house after school or meeting Scott's very American parents for the first time in their home that smelled of strawberry-rhubarb pie.

I eliminate those thoughts that make my heart skip a beat, like me sitting in a dark classroom with only one Barbie-like student's face glaring at my pathetic self sitting at the

desk trying to write an essay with a limited vocabulary. I can still hear her chanting for me to go back to the funny farm where I belong as I tried to write that essay. It was the same for the challenging conflicts with my parents. They believed that I defied my family's belief because I wanted to be more like my friends. There are interactions that remain in my mind like a sunny, perfect day and other moments that seem like a shadowy scene from a suspense movie.

Those memories are why my headaches and stomach aches continued during those years, but it wasn't so much the teachers, it was more the social dilemmas that pushed me to the limits. At Jefferson Junior Senior High School, "survival of the fittest" was the motto. In a multi-cultural environment, I was the foreigner. I arrived on a school bus with a lot of other foreigners and had to survive racial slurs, derogatory remarks and persistent threats. In order to survive I did everything I thought would get me through each day: I straightened my hair, I wore baby-blue Levi corduroys, moved locker areas near the popular kids, and kept to myself as much as possible. But nothing worked until I pushed through the invisible walls that were suffocating me.

I was hated by one clique of local girls who had territorial rights to some of the males on the swim team of which I was a member. One day as I was walking to my locker, Melanie blocked my path, locked eyes with me and said, "You're not so cute, ya know." I tried to step around her.

She pushed me and through clenched teeth said, "Oh no, you little *foreigner*, not so fast."

I didn't know what to do or what to say, "Wh - What do you want?" I stuttered back.

“Stay away from him.” she said loud enough for the whole hall to hear. I looked up and saw Patti approaching her from behind. “Look at me when I’m talking to you, whore!” she growled.

And as if in slow motion, she struck my jaw with her fist. I went reeling back and fell on my butt, books slamming against my chest and my clog flying off my left foot. Patti grabbed Melanie and pinned her to the wall until the sentry arrived.

Sitting in the school’s main office I knew that I had to either lie down and take it for the next couple of years or fight back using more than just my fists. I choose the second option. I had a good reputation with the principal and as a bonus the vice principal was the assistant coach on the swim team. So, I asked to talk to them privately. When we entered the principal’s office, I asked for one of them to call my father and asked if they would wait to have the meeting with Melanie until he got there. Even though the principal was shocked, he said, “That’s a change, usually kids are begging for us not to call home.” Both principals agreed. I knew that my father would advocate for me. I knew that he would help me figure out how to fight back.

My father is a natural-born leader and fighter. Together we decided to press charges of aggravated assault. Melanie was shocked. Little Miss Toughie sat in the chair opposite us, white-faced and teary-eyed. She looked at the principal and said, “All I did was punch her.”

My father answered for him, “You have no right to hit anyone; punching is serious. The law says that no one can cause harm to anyone else and you broke the law.”

The room filled with silence. The principal picked up the phone and called the police.

The next day we went to the district office for a disciplinary hearing. Melanie was suspended long-term and I had to face everyone at school. I knew the rumors about the fight that had already gotten around. I just never thought that I was going to have to prove my toughness again while the yellowish-green bruise on my lip was still healing.

I had gone to see a teacher about an assignment in between classes and walked by a string of lockers that wasn't ordinarily part of my daily path. It happened so fast. I felt a hand pull my hair from behind and heard an unfamiliar voice hiss, "You can't walk by here, white bitch." Not my hair, I thought. I turned and looked at her. She was a very pretty Puerto Rican girl. My heart raced as her friends surrounded me. I managed to spit out, "It takes one to know one." Her face hardened and her fist went soaring. Out of experience with Melanie I dodged the punch and pushed her. I pushed her--hard. She fell back against the lockers. I couldn't stop. I grabbed her head with both hands and banged it up against the locker door. Bang--for all the put-downs. Bang--for all the penned up frustration. Bang--for all the humiliation. Voices broke my consciousness, "The sentry's coming!"

I let her go and mumbled, "I'm sorry," and ran to class, never looking back.

During class I waited for the administrator to walk in. I knew this time he wouldn't be so supportive. He would call this a repeated incident. However, he never came. I skipped swim practice, called my mom to pick me up and went home. The next day, I was waiting for the teacher to open the gym door for class when I heard footsteps. I looked up--it was the Puerto Rican girl with her gang walking toward me. She stood next to me and leaned up against the wall just like I was. Then she looked down at her shoes and said, "Hey."

I looked down at my shoes too and said, "Hey."

I couldn't believe I heard her say, "I respect what you did, It was a tough thing to do. It's not easy around here and you're not a white bitch no more."

I slowly looked up at her and said, "Thanks for not saying anything."

She nodded and said, "You don't have to worry about us no more."

This time I nodded and they turned and walked away. The teacher came and unlocked the door, but I stood there way past the bell. She was right--I wasn't a foreigner anymore; I wasn't a white anything anymore and I didn't have to worry "no more."

So, I push these thoughts away and I think of moments when my mother supported my friends by cooking for them after school. She made an effort to make pizza on Friday evenings so that I would fit in with my new buddies instead of serving us leftover fish from lunch that my brother, sister and I ordinarily got. Our kitchen was lit up from the circular tube halogen light as we sat at our round kitchenette table and ate our pizza made with Muenster cheese and Portuguese sausage instead of mozzarella and pepperoni. Julia, Scott or Patti would beg for more, making me beam. But somehow those other memories would creep back, like the day I wanted to go rollerskating past midnight with my other friends and my parents said no. I lived with old world rules in a new world environment. My restrictive parents and lifestyle also became darkened and chunked into the space that houses certain unnerving moments.

I know now, that at that time, I was feeling that a constant separation from the popular kids was every teenager's disillusionment, but my deepened fear of losing my Portuguese self if I continued to move toward their terrain was worse. Scott, Julia and later Patti understood why I couldn't go out at night and would call me the next day; the

others shunned me. I was struggling to keep my identity and if I continued to rebel and push to be popular, all that was really important to me would get swept up into that dark abyss, only to surface occasionally.

A college professor once asked me, “Who are you on the inside of your skin? Is it different than what people see on the outside?” This question lingered in my thoughts for days on end. I realize that my early adolescent experiences helped me be who I am and how I was perceived socially. There I was, a Portuguese immigrant trying desperately to assimilate into an American culture wearing polyester during the denim trend, speaking in four-word sentences, instead of using four-letter words, and eating from brown-bagged lunches as all of the other students went to the hot lunch spots. I was the bilingual girl who ate sandwiches of crusty Italian bread and boiled eggs from a paper bag in front of my high school building.

At Jefferson Junior Senior high I knew from experience that to go to the cafeteria was social death: the nerds, social geeks, and the foreigners ate there. I also knew that to enter either the burger joints, Al’s Stand or Pat’s, adjacent to the school building would cost me months of work toward building relationships. In order to go into one of those lunch havens, I needed an established high school friend. Territories were marked and if you were new you had to walk in with someone who had scored a spot at the food counter or booth area. So, I ate alone, sitting on a window ledge at the front of the building, while my fellow classmates went across the street to Al’s Stand for a greasy cheeseburger with everything on it and French fries with hot sauce or ketchup poured over the top.

I began to work on my outside while talking to myself on the inside. By ninth

grade, I started wearing my hair straight like Marcia Brady. I would sneak to Archie's on Lyell Ave. with my Portuguese best friend Jackie and buy those light-blue corduroys or Levi jeans to wear to school. I collected quarters from the change that fell out of my father's pocket when he took an afternoon nap so I could buy lunch at Al's. I gathered the courage to become noticed by a group of kids who weren't overly cool because they were in the Regents classes, but cool to have their own territory--the front of the building and the elbow corner of the food counter at Al's.

My father insisted that I take Regents classes regardless of my language barrier. He said I could do it and I just had to work a little harder. So I started smiling and imitating the "Hey, what's up?" Then I would tag along with some of my peers who were in most of my classes, Julia, Scott, Karen, Mark B., and Bob, when they went to Al's Stand for a cheeseburger. As we were walking over, I tried to be cool and toss my paper bag in the rusting trash can, thinking how I would have preferred to eat my mom's tenderly made smoked ham and soft muenster cheese on a hard roll, a peach from my father's backyard garden, strawberry yogurt, and a huge five-cent pickle from my corner deli store.

One day my soon to be friend, Julia, grabbed my arm as I was about to toss my lunch bag in the dreaded trash and said, "Can I have that?"

Shocked I replied, "You want this?"

"Yeah" she eagerly answered, "Who wants a greasy cheeseburger when you can eat ham and cheese on a hard-roll? I've been watching you, and besides, those peaches look great."

My mouth dropped open, chin hitting the cracked concrete sidewalk and eyes

bugging out. I stared as she ate everything, right down to the peach.

“Where did you get the peaches?” she asked as she wiped the sticky juice from her chin.

“My father grows them in our backyard,” I said, still shocked.

“Your father’s peaches are the best.”

That day I became a Portuguese-American. Julia made me feel cool by accepting a part of me that I thought I had to throw away. I started bringing two hearty sandwiches and two pieces of fruit. Julia saved her lunch money and on Wednesdays she bought me what I really wanted from Al’s stand. Nope, not a greasy cheeseburger, but a fried egg sandwich on a hard roll with ketchup. The typical midday sandwich in Portugal topped with a dose of an American condiment. I also would have French fries with ketchup and introduced this red sauce to my family at home.

If only my parents knew how difficult high school was, both socially and academically. I think my mother knew by the small things she did for me: letting me go over to Julia’s house after soccer or swim practice, letting me talk on the phone an extra five minutes, and buying me that curling iron I wanted. My father didn’t show it and didn’t admit it. While I was entering my teenage years, my father saw stormy days and felt the drizzle beat down gently in our home. This man had to live with me, eat with me, laugh with me, and cry with me on the weekends. He worked second shift and therefore my mother made most decisions during the week. But then on the weekends my father was the one we had to go to for permission of any sorts. This is how I think he began to know the problems I faced.

I desperately felt that being popular at school was as important as receiving

straight As. My father desperately felt that being popular at home was as important as straight As. By my father pushing me, pushing hard, sometimes too hard, pushing with occasional pats on the back in the right direction, he slowly pushed my friends away. Friday nights were out of the question for going out and dating was against the rule before any age in high school. The only time I had permission to go to Jackie's, Julia's or Patti's home was after the Saturday chores, because Sunday was church and family day. How does a teenager deal with this? Especially one who doesn't belong?

One time I remember asking him over the phone, "Why can't I sleep over Patti's?"

"Because your bed is here; I'm picking you up."

He did. He dragged me out of Patti's house and into our avocado Chevy and into my house right up the stairs and into my bedroom. He was on a mission. A mission to keep our family together. Some of my friends didn't tolerate seeing me only on Saturday afternoons, but Julia, Patti and Scott did--Jackie doesn't count because she was Portuguese and totally understood and worked around it. So my friends came over during the week after school and the occasional Sunday. They were as loyal as my parents were. This is how I resisted the temptation to lose my Portuguese identity. I turned my back on scorn and sought the skills modeled for me by my parents. I found comfort in my Portuguese heritage and embraced the support of my family and the true friends I had made.

* * * * *

Folk dancing became the in thing to do in the Portuguese community. If you were attractive, had rhythm, and could put up with the grueling practices, you were in. My best Portuguese friend, Jackie, was already dancing for my Tia Nidia. Jackie was the Portuguese Princess of those teenage times: dark hair cut in the latest Farrah Fawcett fashion, olive Mediterranean skin, and chameleon eyes that responded to a moment's whim. We were inseparable on the weekends and summer vacations. She was sixteen with a car, and I was a senior with no car. It was a natural fit. She even liked Scott, Julia, and Patti.

Seeing how we went to different high schools, we had different friends and we didn't exhibit jealousy of these other American friends. Instead, it made for a pretty good time on the weekends. If one group wasn't doing anything, the other group sure was. So between our boys from the Portuguese Association, our high school friends, and each other, we were the social debutantes of the late seventies and early eighties.

With disco on the Rochester map, Jackie and I had the time of our lives. Donna Summers would have been proud of us. We danced the night away to that blue-collar party music in our red pants and glitter tops, iron-curled hair and blue eye shadow. We loved it all: John Travolta's "Saturday Night Fever," Prince's "When Doves Cry," and "Rock Your Baby" by K.C. and the Sunshine Band. This was what America needed at that time—a comrade of all races and nationalities doing the "Bus Stop" and the "Hustle" together on a waxy dance floor until the very *Last Dance*. At that very moment, with the various colored lights flashing around the room, music blaring, and bodies sweating, Jackie and I were American divas. It didn't matter that the next morning I would become the little Portuguese girl who wore her hair straight, went to church, and listened to folk

music.

Indeed, the *Bailinho* was the hit song of our Portuguese community (the word actually means ‘to dance’). So we did. Every weekend we practiced in a church basement or someone’s garage. Our aunts were the choreographers of the traditional folk steps. We tried so hard, but we never seemed to please the critical eyes of our coaches or the veteran older dancers. Nevertheless, I enjoyed going. Feeling the pulsating beat of my country surge through my feet made me almost forget the disco fever I suffered from. When we performed in front of a live audience I suffered instead from a custom ailment: Portuguese pride. I would walk out on the platform dressed in my hand-made folk costume--white pheasant blouse, black vest with embroidered flowers and a yellow cord zig-zaging through the eyelets, red skirt with a black band across the hem with matching embroidered flowers, white lace knee high socks and black chino flats. I would look out to the audience and my shoulders would go back, my chin would inch up slightly, and my body spoke a thousand Portuguese words.

One of my memorable times was when Scott was my partner at the International Fair at the Rochester Science and Museum Center. He had permed his dirty blond hair that summer and wore contacts. He was the all-American boy next door. However, there he was wearing the black pants, white shirt and red sash of our male folk costume. He reminded me of what a great friend he really was as he took my arm and linked it into his. Scott was a trooper; he flung me around, hurried to keep step, and kept on smiling through the vigorous line up. I was getting into the song’s pulsating beat when my shoe came off. I just kept on dancing. At the end of the dance while everyone continued to applaud, Scott went over, picked it up, and with his sly grin said, “Missing something,

dancing queen?"

“The language is what makes it so difficult. I couldn’t walk on the streets, work, or socialize in my community because of the language. Even today, I shy away from the English language, afraid I will make a mistake or be misunderstood. There is one place where I can communicate without a problem, in church. When I first came to the United States, I continued to attend Mass. I knew the Mass outline and I would follow the Mass with my Portuguese missal until I finally was able to use the English missal. Faith is what endured me, along with my family’s support and my 20-year-old daughter’s guidance. We became closer friends. The vast emotions of wanting to go home to Madeira, where I had everything I needed, and where I had a familiar environment still is with me today. The sights of Christmas and the noise of tradition call me back every day. But faith keeps me here.”

Angelina Sosa, age 76

Experiencing Faith the Portuguese Way

A candle signifies one of my mother's most enlightening virtues that she continues even today to instill in all of her children: faith. It isn't something one only expresses, but also what one feels from within. Like a candle, it glows from the inner self.

Thanks to my dedicated mother whenever we visit our family in Portugal, our pilgrimage to Fátima is traditional. As I close my eyes, I can see the vast spiritual land that is sacred to Our Lady of Fátima. This place where the Virgin Mary appeared to three children, performed miracles and showered the people with hope still continues to draw thousands of people a day. I am immediately drawn to the sense of peace and tranquility that runs through my veins when I gape into the black iron crib full of candles--all white. Like people, there is every hue of white: off white, bone, natural, yellowish white, antique white and bright white.

The candles are all burning in unison and each with an intention. These intentions could be for a loved one who is ill or has passed away. Some of these prayers are a desire to increase faith or peace in an individual or family. Maybe even something as simple as a prayer of two people who are about to complete the sacrament of marriage, or a young adult about to take a university-level exam. The candles also expose a credence to those who stand around the enormous iron crate praying into the massive warm glow of all the candles. Despair and hope melt with the wax. I am always mesmerized to see the candles tilt over and melt together, forming a bond of faith.

As I turn away from this mesmerizing sight, I see yet another miraculous

occurrence: Women, men, and even teenagers and children walking on their knees around and around the concrete premises of this holy place. Candles are just half of what their intentions hold. Sacrifice is also required. Some of these pilgrims walk this way for miles, until their padded knees bleed, the bloodstains reflecting their devotion. Their loss, tragedy, or grief so obvious in the pain and suffering molded in their faces. A young husband dead, a suffering father, a child killed. The candles are only the beginning of a journey that will continue long after the candles' blaze dies. Just as I continued to help my friends (who are not a part of the Portuguese community) make sense of my old world faith. Even today, I have colleagues question my dedication to such a "forefather" type of tradition.

For most of them, the image of "pilgrims" evokes the notion of early settlers, newly arrived on a continent called America, dressed in Puritan clothing and gathered to give thanks for the blessings of the first bountiful harvest. For most of them, the cardboard figures that adorn doors, windows and tables come out but once a year. In reality for us, the pilgrim and the journey known as the pilgrimage is a unique expression of the Israelites' worship of the one God. Today, it still is a demonstration of dedication and reflection of faith for many Portuguese citizens worldwide, including me, and so we include candlelight celebrations as a means to complete this spiritual journey.

I remember how my mother would subdue my fears of the dark at bedtime. I can hear the soft gentleness of her voice, "My daughter, look for the light, not only will it warm you and guide you, but most of all, draw the strength you need from its glow. Look inside for your very own candle, with its radiance have faith and it will always continue to shine." This message during my nighttime fears, all the candles in our home growing up,

all the candles in my home now, all the candles that my family and I light after Mass on Sundays at church, not only help me conquer my fears now as an adult, but facilitates my walk in life with a remarkable luminosity.

My spiritual path is based on the fact that Roman Catholicism is the faith of about ninety-seven percent of the Portuguese people and of my family. For most of Portugal's citizens, the church is an important part of daily life. Everyone regularly attends services. Sundays are full of people walking to church in their finest clothes. In northern Portugal where I am from, people are generally more devout than in other parts of the country, often making agonizing pilgrimages, sometimes for miles on their knees, to hilltop shrines and chapels, like the one in Fátima. The first time I experienced this scene I couldn't stop staring at the crawling women. I wondered who had died or what could have happened to compel someone to endure such pain for miles and miles.

The basilica at Fátima, on the very spot where three peasant children repeatedly witnessed apparitions of the Virgin Mary in 1917, is a focal point for this kind of religious activity. It is the focal point of our family vacations. From May to October, daily, over fifty thousand Portuguese go to the shrine at Fátima—not to mention the thousands of tourists from other parts of the world. And I am one of them. I can't stop myself from going. I can't make other plans. I can only follow the massive crowds and pray with my family. Along with the pilgrims, who often arrive at the shrine on their knees to show their devotion, leave gifts as further tokens of esteem, hear Masses and attend candlelight vigils at night that celebrate the anniversary of a vision of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, that lasts for over four hours, I sit on a blanket on the concrete ground. I'm wrapped in blankets to shelter myself from the nightly winds. I hold my candle and

vigilantly make sure the flame doesn't go out. I welcome my daughter's head on my lap and my son's back against mine. The hours go by quickly.

Within the boundaries of time and space, a pilgrimage enables me to realize that in whatever circumstances I find myself, I am capable of also finding God, if only I make an attempt to find Him out--so I do, the Portuguese way. In Portugal's own backyard the people have an opportunity to experience a message that can be sought out through sacrifice, prayer, and forgiveness. This message facilitates this vital need that the Portuguese have to carve out a place in their schedules reserved solely for getting back to their essential faith and sacrifice. A pilgrimage takes the Portuguese believer, like myself, out of our everyday routines and brings us once again to an outward expression of our daily belief. Prayer takes that Portuguese sacrifice into the everyday routine that brings me once again to an inward expression of my daily devotion. In this manner it anchors me to my Christian community. For my family and me here and in Portugal it provides family ties, celebration, Catholic sacraments (weddings, baptism, etc.), important activities for us.

It is amazing to see a reflection of this--how Mary serves as a bridge for all generations to seek God in celebration, or even when confronted with unreasonable odds, tragedies and losses. The majority of teenagers in Portugal swing by Mass before going to the café; this doesn't happen here. Instead teenagers try to escape Sunday Mass. Almost all of the elders in Portugal attend daily Mass, and the thirty-something parents raise their children to continue in this natural dedication of love. In addition, all age groups participate in the holidays of the Catholic faith. For my family and I, experiencing faith as a journey across a bridge, while praying, while dancing, and while eating with family and friends, produces a strong connection, not only to God, but to one another.

This is what our family and the few members of the Portuguese community in the 19th Ward began to emulate. We too began to explore our backyard here in the states. Until I was in my early teens, my family and other Portuguese families like the Silvas and Ambrosios would make a pilgrimage by car to a small shrine in Lewiston, New York, about an hour away, to honor Our Lady of Fátima. We would dress in our Sunday best, pack coolers full of drinks and picnic foods, and spend the entire day attending Mass at the shrine and picnicking on the grounds.

In addition, the Portuguese American Association has an annual Independence day picnic with an outdoor Mass said by a Portuguese priest from Canada. St. Augustine's Church began to recognize our community by housing our sacramental celebrations at the school hall or by offering a coffee hour at the end of a baptismal Mass. The familiar attitude and state of mind of the Portuguese and our family at that time, displayed the need to emphasize neighbor and community as well as family as a crucial way of life for the Portuguese immigrant. In comparison to the American way of life, this may seem liberal and not easily attainable, but it is the balance of religion and daily life that creates this Old World fundamental accomplishment.

For my father, mother, and me it has become a life long journey. St. Augustine's continued to provide the support necessary throughout those acclimatizing years. Father McCabe, Father Trott, Father Ring, Sister Rita, and Sister Saint Luke are all names that chimed cultural support on Sunday mornings. But in the past ten years, names like Mary Ellen Fisher, Father O'Connell, Father Ray, Heide Parreño, and Father Bob Werth have added ethnic fuel to the fire in our burning hearts. This encouragement spread among our whole congregation and created a new sensitivity to the way we experience faith. As

Father Bob put it, “We have an opportunity to listen with our hearts.” That’s exactly what all of us Portuguese immigrants felt during those first few years following our arrival and what we continue to do today in a different role--parishioners listen to the liturgy read in Portuguese and listen with their hearts .

We have formed a Portuguese Committee of the 19th Ward that does exactly what our community has always desired: organizing a way for all age groups to participate in holidays geared around the Catholic faith; festive celebrations honoring specific spiritual role models, such as Saint Augustine, Saint Anthony, Francis of Assisi; and various annual feasts honoring Mary, Mother of God: the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Our Lady of Fátima, Our Lady of Assumption, Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of Graces, Our Lady of Travels and Our Lady of the Rosary--all of which produce that resilient connection to one another. This certainly has made my relationship with God more profound, but somehow the relationships that I have made within the congregation and Portuguese community extend deeper.

Those moments when we first arrived in the States were very stressful and we could have used an outreach person like Heide. She has sheltered the modern-day refugee in the walls of our church and in the arms of the congregations. She is the “queen” of multicultural awareness and brings a cultural consciousness into the hearts of the people she comes into contact with. She has become a caring friend to many and myself, a leader to all in the 19th Ward, and a teacher to those who are teachers. Her office has bags of clothing for needy children, a calendar with dates that have double and sometimes triple bookings, but somehow she manages to find tranquility in what she does and for those who enter her world. She begins a meeting not only with a prayer but also with a cup of

tea to calm the weary. But most of all, she always makes time to seek you out, make you feel like you are the only person in the room despite the many that surround you by tenderly hugging you and asking, "How are you?"

Father Bob does the same. He has become my mentor, my spiritual leader, and has culturally validated me. We not only feel special, but we are special. We are special because people are special—he treats everyone's needs like a nurse dedicated to each patient. His primary rule is that it's not his church, but the people's church. If the Portuguese community needs a priest to speak Portuguese and we can't get one to travel here, then "I'll learn Portuguese"—it's his leadership motto. He has validated our culture in a way that has brought the whole Portuguese community together in peace.

The Rochester Portuguese-American Association became very political several years back. Somehow the club's values shifted and that fundamental way of Portuguese life drifted away. It got so bad that I even withdrew from my volunteer work with the club and as a member. A division between the community developed and Father Bob helped by paving the way to a reconciliation by using that primary rule as a fundamental value system and by allowing the community to pray, eat, dance and celebrate as God's family while experiencing faith the Portuguese way. He took the politics out of our spiritual lives. I know this may sound like the job of a priest—to bring people together in prayer—but Father Bob does this by using our Portuguese way of daily living and by making the connection between our relationships with one another as well as the one with God. This is profound and it is symbolized in the community events that we encounter through his guidance and the congregation's support.

For instance, on May 13, 20 and 27 of 2001, our committee held our first annual

Our Lady of Fátima religious processions in the streets of the 19th Ward. This was radical and unheard of in this demographic area. We invited Rochester dignitaries, all of the priests from the diocese, the parish members of the cluster churches, parish council members, and anyone who wanted to come. We were on a mission to reunite the three cluster churches by processing from St. Augustine's Church on Chili Avenue to Our Lady of Good Counsel Church on Brooks Avenue on the 13th, from Our Lady of Good Counsel Church to St. Monica's church on Genesee Street on the 20th, and from St. Monica's back to St. Augustine's on the 27th. This was a kick-off event; then in the following years we traveled to only one church, alternating each year among the three on the second Sunday of May.

My favorite aspect of the procession is how it imitates the Old World style: drummers announce our path, banners held by parishioners identify the parishes, flags wave representing the different nations, canopy barriers with white gloves shelter the Holy Eucharist, men in suits bear the weight of the float that holds the image of Our Lady of Fátima surrounded in real white flowers, three children dress as the witnessing peasant shepherds, winged angels hold ribbons of faith, and the crowd of people follow in the back praying the rosary. This is as close to our spiritual home as we can get and could expect. What we didn't expect during that first procession was what happened next.

As I walked alongside the procession assisting the traffic-flow with the Rochester City Police, I heard the crowd in the back gasp. Some of the women began shouting and pointing to the sky, "Look at the sky; it's a miracle! *Um milagre!*" So I looked up. To my amazement, the sun seemed to fall where I could have lifted my hand to touch it and a spectacular simple ring surrounded it. I couldn't stop walking, but I also couldn't stop

staring at this spectacle. The uproar from the crowd began to subside and we all continued walking, praying, and crying. Tears cascaded down my cheeks like the flow of a river as I realized that this was indeed the “miracle of the sun.”

As I walked I could here my father tell the story to our young ears, “No one believed the three pheasant children when they told of the Virgin Mary appearing to them and asking for people to pray and sacrifice. Therefore, the children asked for Her to perform a miracle. She told the children to spread the news that She would appear on the 13th of October--the last apparition. On that day hundreds of people came to see if the children were telling the truth. Witnesses saw this bright light appear as the children kneeled and appeared to be talking to someone. Suddenly the sky darkened and it poured rain, the bright light began dancing around like a ball of fire and people thought that the sun was dancing. When it all stopped, the people were dry, ground and all.”

On the day following our procession, an article in the *Democrat and Chronicle* tried rationalizing our miracle of the sun as a scientifically explained weather phenomena. It alleged that these rings produced from moisture are rarely seen, especially in Rochester. So, if this is true, than it confirmed what we really thought: If it is so rare then why did this halo, that reflected all the colors of the rainbow around the sun, appear during the entire length of our processions? Why did we have three halos on three consecutive Sundays? Why did they remain in the sky during the entire time it took to process from one church to the next at different times of the day due to Mass schedules? We can't answers these questions, but at least we crossed the Atlantic on a bridge experiencing faith the Portuguese way.

*“When it comes to food, I am Portuguese
one hundred percent - I’m sorry U.S.”*

John Alves, age 53

Aromas Across the Atlantic

Every Christmas the smell of my mother's flan with the hint of caramelizing sugar overwhelmed our home. We all knew what was on the menu, but somehow it did not lessen the anticipation of the delicious feast that was soon to be devoured. This feast not only consisted of the main course, but also of a banquet of desserts. My mother would begin making all of the desserts in the dawn hours of Christmas Eve. The aroma would tantalize our senses before we were even fully awake. Gradually throughout the day, the mingling scents became overwhelming. My sister never could contain herself and ended up in the kitchen helping my mother. I jokingly told her that she tasted more than she helped. I also realized that my mother made the flan just before starting dinner and, if my sister helped all day she would have the honor of stirring the custard and licking the wooden spoon.

In order to make this rich custard Portuguese style, one has to do two steps together. First, start with our family recipe of a pudding mixture in a big iron pot that cooks slowly and is painstakingly stirred. Second, melt down the sugar in a separate pan. When the custard is bubbly and thick and the sugar is melted, my mother would pour both ingredients simultaneously into one container. Our eyes were filled with amazement, our ears filled with crackling sounds and our noses consumed with the aroma of caramelized sugar. Our wonder would continue as we sat down to devour the flan. The dark golden sugar swirled through every spoonful enticing our eyes. The texture of the custard wrapped around each taste bud creating a mouthwatering experience.

There is never a sound at the table when consuming this annual dessert. The

sounds come after the consumption: all the “mmms,” the murmuring approvals and the familiar sound of the spoons searching the barren bowls for more. There hasn’t been a Christmas where I haven’t complained of the scent of the flan lingering, and tempting us all for more, when in fact there is not one millimeter of space in my swollen belly for more pudding.

This scent is so memorable that every time I enter a carnival and smell cotton candy being freshly made, it triggers thoughts of the delicious Christmas flan. I sometimes walk by the cotton candy stand just to absorb the vague scent of sugar melting. I stop and close my eyes trying to visualize that spoonful of the custard with the dark-brown sugar swirl. When I hear, “May I help you,” I snap back to the sights and sounds of the carnival and away from my mother’s cozy kitchen at Christmas time. I then give the server a quizzical look. For how do I tell this person that I don’t care for the cotton candy, but only the aroma. Instead of trying to explain, I buy one and give it away to my family along with a story of a familiar memory.

Food is memory, taste is tradition, and hunger is satisfied only after eating with family and friends. For example, one of my favorite dishes is *Caldeirada de Peixe*, a Portuguese fish stew or soup, depending on the region. It contains a variety of fish and shellfish, along with potatoes, tomatoes, bay leaves, coriander or parsley, and sometimes sweet peppers or cabbage. Another favorite is the *Caldeirada de Carne*, the meat version with salted pork ribs, various Portuguese sausages, cut up whole chicken, a huge beef roast that is boiled with potatoes, white and green cabbage, and carrots. When I attempt to cook a small version of it, it just doesn’t taste right. But if I make it for a family/friend dinner gathering, or if I eat it at my parents home with all of us around the table, it instead

brings the coastal aromas of Portugal to our dining room.

What makes the scent and flavors of Portuguese cooking unique is the impressive manner in which the cook uses spices in savory dishes so faintly that they enhance the end result without identifying themselves. Or just as impressive, they use just a minimal amount of ingredients to intensify flavor. For instance, cumin, curry, ginger, cayenne red pepper, and my favorite *Piri-Piri*--a red hot pepper sauce, are found in some of the traditional dishes, but their individual presence is undetectable except for an undeniable heat. These flavors are a representation of all of Portugal's surrounding countries. The Portuguese navigators of the early fifteenth century were responsible for supplying exotic ingredients to our homeland.

Piri-piri peppers, for example, were brought to Portugal and spread throughout the Portuguese colonies. The Portuguese cooks learned to capture this tiny fiery pepper by steeping it with olive oil, garlic cloves, salt and sometimes vinegar or lemon. This infusion creates a hot seasoning oil that has become a staple in the kitchen. It is added to all types of meat and fish soups, sauces, marinades, and *Caldeiradas*. There are bottled versions that are put alongside salt and pepper shakers at restaurants, but there is nothing like the homemade varieties. Favorites of my family and me are: *Gambas*, jumbo shrimp called prawns; and *Frango Grelhado*, whole chickens grilled on an open flame by continuously brushing *molho* that creates a piquant skin that makes your tastebuds beg for more.

But mostly, cooks like my mother master the art of using simple ingredients to make a memorable dish. I have learned to marinate meats overnight steeped in wine, olive oil, paprika, black and red pepper, and garlic and when cooking the meat, I use fresh garlic

and paprika, onion, bay leaves and salt and pepper--if I don't my family will eat less and comment that it has a meaty flavor or it's not like VóVó's (grandma-ma, my mother). My mother's *Lombo de Porco Assado*, a slow-roasted loin of pork begins the day before it is eaten as it is marinated in the above ingredients thoroughly before it is roasted. That's the secret. By laying out the pork loin on a bed of olive oil and sliced onions in a baking dish, and pouring a little dry wine over the loin the last half hour, simplicity becomes succulence. My family says that I am very close to duplicating it. I have conversely learned how to make rice just like VóVó's. I make it every other day.

Portuguese eat a rice at almost every meal and we make it hundreds of ways: There's an orange-colored rice made with tomatoes, a colorful rice made with peas, a typical rice made with dark kidney beans, a delicate rice made with white navy beans and shredded carrots, a hearty rice with octopus or *amêijoas*--a tiny sweet, thin-shelled clam. Those are just some of the ways that rice is often served.

I do need to learn how to master certain favorites like *Bolinhos de Bacalhau*--a codfish cake appetizer that makes itself at home in every Portuguese kitchen. This easy continental-style recipe for salt cod is a recipe served frequently throughout the year and always on special occasions. It is the Rochesterian version of Buffalo style chicken wings.

As a young girl I enjoyed watching my mother form the cakes into an egg shape by using two tablespoons. Her wrists would fly like the flapping of a dove's wing. With one hand she would take a spoonful of the potatoes, parsley, and codfish mixture, and with the other hand using a rotating motion, insert the bowl of the second spoon behind the mixture, scooping it out of the first spoon--the key to getting a perfect sphere like shape and smooth finish is to repeat this several times in a back-and-forth rhythm. In the same

motion my mother gently dropped the *bolinho* in the deep fryer.

Bacalhau, salted codfish, is a staple in Portuguese cooking and in my mother's kitchen; just like rice there are numerous ways to cook it. This multipurpose fish needs to be reconstituted in water for at least forty-eight hours prior to cooking or it may remain too salty. However, it can be pan-fried with rings of onions, slivered garlic, and olive oil, baked in a clay casserole dish, grilled until blackened, or simply boiled with potatoes, eggs and dark green cabbage, my daughter's favorite. I am amazed how my cousins who have acclimated themselves to McDonalds, pizza, and hotdogs cringe at the sight of me eating whole grilled sardines or *Bacalhau*.

I may have grown to love mashed potatoes and gravy, pizza with black olives, mushrooms, and peppers, and pasta dishes, but I serve them all with main entrees that reflect Portuguese cuisine. I take pride in the fact that Marco and Miranda prefer to eat codfish or rabbit instead of a hamburger or hotdog. I take pride in having acquired this taste for authentic old country cooking and passing it on to the next generation. So I ignore my cousins and others who think that this is peasant food. Even if it used to be a poor man's meat, such things as codfish have become a delicacy. I can buy salted cod in Rochester and feel like I'm in my mother's kitchen on a Friday afternoon on one side of the ocean, or at my grandmother's quaint kitchen on the other side of the ocean, and have it taste just the same.

Sometimes no matter how hard we try, there are some dishes that can't be duplicated in our American kitchens. It might be the lack of an ingredient or a substitution like skate for pollock, but I think it's really about freshness. In Portugal the dish of the day depends on what is available that day. Go to the butcher and a lamb has been

slaughtered that day--that's what will be roasted for Sunday dinner. The fish lady pushes her cart by your door and she has fresh whole sardines--that's what's on that days lunch menu. The bakery has an abundance of *Pastéis de Nata*, a custard-cream tart baked in a flaky puff-pastry shell, and it is the dessert of the evening. These are my son's and husband's favorite and only bought at Portuguese bakeries--never attempted at home.

I have, however, grilled whole sardines for birthday gatherings on a warm summer's day with my American friends back ten feet away until I encourage them to try it and show them the sardine stance for eating them correctly, which is like the Philly cheese-steak stoop. I serve it with a salad of tomatoes, onions, and grilled peppers with a drizzle of olive oil and vinegar and a sprinkle of course sea salt just like my *Tia Laurinda* in Portugal. Nevertheless, I clean the scales of the sardines and marinate them overnight in lemon, course salt, and olive oil. But those frozen *Sardinhas* out of a two-pound bag bought at Olindo's just don't have that melt in your mouth savor. I relish more the moment, knowing that I am eating a grilled sardine in the correct stance: feet apart, a piece of hearty bread with the sardine in one hand while the other hand holds the tail to secure the fish. Then, as you sink your teeth on the top half of the sardine, the balls and heels of the feet begin to rock back and forth, and don't stop until the sardine is consumed and the bread is dipped in the pepper and tomato salad and devoured. Instead of the taste, I let the aroma carry me back to the festive streets during *Sao Pedro*.

Last year I took my 12-year-old daughter, son and five of his friends to Portugal. This was my son's high school graduation gift. He chose to go during *Sao Pedro* because of the abundance of food, drink, and music. *Sao Pedro* is a celebration to honor our patron saint, Saint Peter. This festival lasts for three days and everyone, I mean everyone,

is out on the streets until all hours of the morning, eating and drinking and dancing. The narrow cobblestone streets are decorated with blue and yellow pinafore banners zig-zaging from one balcony to the next the length of the street. Gold and metallic blue garlands adorn doors and balconies, lighted signs, and arcs at the entrances of the main avenues and shrine displays of St. Peter. Everything is closed off to vehicles; it's like a huge block party except it's the whole town.

My son's friends were in awe of how the Portuguese grilled sardines, pork fillets, and fresh bacon served with boiled potatoes and a parsley sauce in the middle of the cobblestone streets. They were amazed to see young and old dancing to music that blared out the open windows or at a makeshift outdoor discothèque. They were shocked to see families sitting at their doorsteps at four in the morning listening to their grandfather play folk music on his guitar. They were even more astonished to witness these people sacrifice and get up early the last day to go to Mass and watch the religious procession along the *Avenida*. I asked them what their favorite part was and with the exception of one friend who said, "The girls" all them said, "The food."

“The culture is dissipating with me because I married someone who is American and I feel guilty that my children don’t speak the language, that I can’t make certain foods for them. It’s only during holidays and when Grandmother makes something for them that they have a taste of what it is to be Portuguese. That is how life is and the farther you get out in the generations the more acclimated you get to the American life and I accept it, but feel bad. I fear when my parents pass, that my children will lose their Portuguese and even their last name isn’t Portuguese. But the family values that are based on our culture as Portuguese immigrants, I pass that on.”

Cristina Pietropoli, age 35

A Thankful Tradition

My sister's wedding in May of 2004 was the wedding of the 21st century. It had a royal theme and in the end it was fit for royalty. Everything glittered with gold, flickered with flair, and sparkled with elegance. My daughter and I wore Vera Wang gowns. Mine is a gold silk lame with an organza-pleated train and Miranda's is a strapless parfait pink silk lame. My favored moment was when I saw my sister, Linda for the first time after she got dressed. My mother helped her get ready and when she called for me and I opened my mother's bedroom door and saw Linda standing there, I gasped. She looked like all those black-and-white photographs of my young mother--like a 1940s Hollywood star.

The three-inch high custom made *Paris* tiara surrounded her Audrey Hepburn bun, the regal Anne Barge tuxedo-style dress with glass amber beads, and her smile when she turned to look at me was too much and I couldn't hold back the tears. I ran to get my camera with black-and-white film. I clicked as she left for church in her George Harrison Rolls Royce limousine. I clicked as she strolled into church with that same dynamic look my mother has. I clicked as she waited for family at the George Eastman house where she was to be photographed. I kept clicking in black-and-white to capture not only that day, but also a little bit of the past.

My wedding was totally the opposite. I married for love at the age of twenty, twenty years ago. I know, how clichéd that sounds, but it's true. I had a small wedding during the Thanksgiving weekend so that all of my out-of-town family could attend. My fiancée and I were both scared and unsure of such a huge commitment, but we were

confident in our feelings for one another. Mark was my high school sweetheart and he made me feel *normal*. I say this because I never really felt like a normal teenager. I always felt like a foreigner. When I was with Mark, I didn't worry about how I looked or acted, and was able to be myself. When we had a discussion once about the days when we first met, he told me that he thought I was more mature than all of the other girls in school. He said, smiling, "Not to mention that I thought you were *hot*, with your long waist-length hair and big brown eyes." He also told me something I had always felt, "I never thought of you as a foreigner, until I met your mom, then I thought, wow, they really *are* foreigners."

I remember the day he walked into our home to ask my father for my hand in marriage. His long curly hair was wet from the rain and his black leather jacket must have made my father want to kick him out. Mark represented a different way of life--one that my father thought wouldn't coincide with ours. Instead, after some awkward moments and intense words, my father opened a bottle of champagne and wished us the best. It wasn't easy during those days. But I was seduced by the fact that I could make codfish omelets and homemade French fries for dinner and Mark would devour it. I was seduced by the knowledge that if I mispronounced a word like cinnamon, by saying ciminon, Mark would respond affectionately. I was ultimately seduced by the thought of waking in the morning feeling beautiful on the inside and out. I knew that the foundation that Mark and I had built was just as much about who I was as a Portuguese wife as he was an American husband.

When we were raising the children he always was open to the way I looked at things through the eyes of a Portuguese mother. When he was playing the drums in a

rock-n-roll band and wanted me to come out to hear him, he understood if I felt that I needed to stay at home with the children. My friends at the time didn't understand. They slowly stopped calling. I was a young mother and they thought that I should leave the children with a babysitter and go out partying. I couldn't. My mother never did when we were little. When I would mention this to my mother she was shocked at the thought of it. She would always say the same thing: "A bar is not a place for a mother." When I did go out, she would watch the children and I would be home before midnight, just like when I was a teenager living at home. I lost most of my friends during those years because of these kinds of values. But it was okay with me. My family was more important.

I worried more about how I could get the children and Mark to speak Portuguese, or how to make *Caldo Verde* soup for dinner when my brother and sister were in town. I worried about whether the children would continue with the traditions that I was trying to instill with Mark's support, like the *Dia dos Três Reis* celebration. January 6th is Three Kings Day in Portugal and it's celebrated as passionately as Christmas Day. This Epiphany observance honors the three kings arrival in Bethlehem to see the baby Jesus and present Him with gifts. To my family and me this is when real holiday gift-giving tradition originated.

I began this traditional holiday in our home and the baby Jesus brings a small gift for Marco and Miranda. Every year on the eve of Three Kings Day the children go look at the nativity scene in our home to see if their unwrapped gift is there. We celebrate by eating octopus rice and *Rabanadas* just like my parents did as children and I did as a child. We listen to folk music and my mother sings Christmas folksongs of long ago, while my children and I keep beat with our hands on the edge of the table. My mother's voice rings

out, “*Pastores, pastores, vamos todos a Belem.*” Even though we are in Rochester, New York, and my children’s last name reflects an American culture, I still manage to pass on my traditions in the midst of Fourth of July picnics with hotdogs and macaroni salad and Christmas Day with Mark’s mother’s lasagna and red Jell-O with fruit cocktail.

I also managed to establish our own customs at home: Christmas morning with Bing Crosby singing *Silver Bells* in the background and wrapping paper scattered throughout the living room floor, Easter morning with the egg hunt and the jelly bean trail from the bedrooms to the overflowing Easter baskets, and Thanksgiving afternoon with a bountiful spread for dinner. This is my favorite holiday now. It was Grandma Guyer's favorite and I couldn't wait to weave this American holiday into our family's lives. My mother attempted Thanksgiving over the years, but it always had a Portuguese emphasis. But when we bought our house, the first thing I did was announce to the family that everyone was coming to our house for Thanksgiving dinner.

I didn't know what I was getting myself into. I had never cooked for more than four people. Now I had to cook for twelve people. I knew how to make rice, a roasted chicken, and soup. Not much of an American menu for Thanksgiving. So I hit the cookbooks, and historical resources for ideas on authentic cuisine of the day. I learned a lot and decided to attempt the twenty-five pound turkey along with creamed corn from scratch (made with cream cheese), stuffed acorn squash (with a ham and mushroom breadcrumb stuffing), sweet potatoes (baked whole), mashed potatoes (Barb, my sister-in-law's recipe with butter and milk), gravy (thick, brown and with meat bits), corn bread (spoon style), cranberry sauce (with walnuts and crushed pineapple), and my mother's stuffing (with *Choriço*, Portuguese sausage), a must-have. For dessert, I decided to try

apple and pumpkin pies (homemade crusts), a chocolate cream pie (French silk style), and apple crisp (with an oatmeal crumble topping). This has become the heart of my menu each year.

Even though that first Thanksgiving my brother observed that the pasty mashed potatoes could stick to the ceiling, I was so proud. Mark was so proud, too. He doesn't complain anymore of sitting at the table for hours--instead he offers *Macieira* Portuguese brandy to my father and brother. I was the first to make an American holiday a genuine part of our bicultural world. Now it's a tradition and my son can't wait for the creamed corn, Mark can't wait for the stuffed acorn squash, and Miranda can't wait for the mashed potatoes and gravy. My family now insists that I make the best apple and pumpkin pies and they try to save room for desert. But as for me, I can't wait for Thanksgiving to see Tony and Barb, Linda and her husband Harry, my parents, my nephews, and Mark and my own children sitting at the table all together saying grace the American way.

“Entering college with low scores because of the language barrier I needed to take summer courses to meet the demands of the college requirements at the University of Rochester. The Equal Opportunity Program helped me in some ways, but as a result there was a culture clash within that program. I wasn’t Hispanic. I wasn’t black. There was only one or two other ethnicities and I found it difficult to deal with. In the program you had to stay close to one another socially by integrating with the members and I felt very different when participating in those activities. So I sat in a corner. This is when I knew I had to do my own thing and I did. I looked at other options like the Greek program and fraternities as something I would enjoy. In Portugal I was a Boy Scout and enjoyed belonging to clubs and groups. This was important because of the sense of belonging, sense of identity, and a sense of brotherhood. I was looking for different types of friends I could relate to. As a result I was able to do much better, academically, socially, and linguistically.”

Assis Flores, age 52

Bi-Cultural Barriers

My third grade teacher at school sixteen made all the difference in the world. Actually, she inspired me to go into bilingual education as an adult. I remember walking into Mrs. Dvorin's class every morning and being greeted like all the other students. She would smile at me just like she smiled at the others; she would hug me as many times as she hugged the others, and she even found a way to communicate with me. I couldn't read or write at grade level yet, but that didn't matter to Mrs. Dvorin. Her priority was making me feel comfortable in my new environment. She let me look at books about Portugal and copy facts out of the book for our projects; she made sure I participated during Show-and-Tell by doing most of the talking about whatever object I held timidly in front of me; and she partnered me with sensitive children who would show me pictures of children playing on farms or other different types of scenery across the U.S.

The most significant thing that she did for me was to meet my parents. She asked if she could take me out to lunch at the end of the school year as a reward if I continued working so hard. I didn't *feel* like I was working so hard, but that was her intention. She got me to relax and then I was able to open up with her and trust her. Words became sentences, stories became images in my mind, and images became pictures on paper with undeveloped text written below it. I must have done well because she came to pick me up on a Saturday. I remember it was a bright spring afternoon and she took us to the Tiptop restaurant on West Henrietta Road. By then I was communicating well enough verbally and I remember our exchange when ordering lunch.

Ms. Dvorin asked me, "What is your favorite food?"

"Fish," I replied.

"Well, do you like shrimp?"

"I don't know that word?"

"Would you like to try it? It comes from the ocean like fish and I think you will like it."

I trusted her and simply said, "Yes."

When my entrée arrived there were six jumbo shrimp breaded and deep fried with French fries on my plate. I looked at it, picked up one French fry and ate it slowly. I finally took my fork and pierced one of the shrimp. Lifting it up to my nose I recognized a faint smell that I remembered smelling at home. My worry slipped away and I took a small bite. I loved it. My smile must have given me away. Mrs. Dvorin said, "Another new word, seafood. Shrimp is seafood, not fish, and I am glad you like it."

I shook my head yes and continued to eat.

When I was in middle and junior high school I took a few steps back from the progress I'd made with Mrs. Dvorin and that my summer vacations provided for me. I don't know how I passed fourth grade. All I remember doing then was coloring, going to music class even when my class didn't go, and going to another teacher for reading and math. I know now from my educational background that it must have been remedial reading and math class--pullout. This service is intended to be affirmative. It is provided by each district for remedial teaching, English as a Second and Other Language(ESOL), or special education. Ironically, it becomes destructive because students are separated from their peers. All the students knew, and even today know, that "pull out" means

“stupid.” This is a major factor why as a teacher I participate in an inclusion setting for special education and insist on “push in” for those other services.

In fifth grade I had a teacher who humiliated me all the time. She spoke very fast when giving directions and I was lost most of the time. When my report card reflected this, I explained to my parents that I couldn’t understand all of the directions. My parents suggested that I ask a neighboring student to clarify what I was supposed to do. When I tried this approach, I was still unclear of what to do; I was punished instead of praised. This made me even more confused.

My teacher made me write *I must be quiet*, 300 times, after yelling at me in front of the whole class about how I must not talk to my peers. So I wrote, *I must be quite*, three hundred times. When I walked up to her desk and gave it to her, she looked at it and in a loud voice said, “You wrote *I must be quite*, not *I must be quiet*. Write it over again, the right way.” I couldn’t believe my ears or my stupidity. I walked back to my seat amidst all the muffled giggles. When I finished writing it over again I handed it to her, and she looked at it, looked at me, and threw it in the wastebasket. The stack of papers seemed to fall in slow motion, just like the rest of the year did. I became known as the talkative child among the teachers and as the stupid kid among the students. By the time I went into junior high, administrators decided that I should be bussed to Jefferson Junior and Senior High School along with my brother and most all of the Portuguese in our neighborhood. The propose was to place me in the school’s ESOL program.

My whole body gets clammy as I think of the shame in middle school. Learning a new language was arduous enough, trying to obtain an American dialect instantly to reduce the typecast was impossible, and to be an adolescent of the “sink-or-swim”

programs of the late '70s made it unbearable. There was a choice during this time for families with children who spoke another language other than English: enroll in the ESOL program or register in the mainstream program. I knew some English from my late elementary years, but not enough to sit in a mainstream junior high class. The school decided to put me in ESOL on a trial basis. I lasted two weeks.

Just when I thought maybe things would get better for me in school, I got a teacher who wasn't any better than the teachers I had chalked up as uncompassionate, unethical monsters. The teacher treated each culture in that room as a separate disease. Asian equaled Typhoid, Hispanic equaled Malaria, and Portuguese equaled Rubella. She stood far away from us all: usually at the front of the room near the chalkboard yelling out survival English to us. She couldn't pronounce my name even as she demanded that language comprises of respect. So if I mispronounced a word or misplaced a verb, I was being disrespectful. This didn't last long with me.

One day she mocked my name; mispronouncing it purposely after I mispronounced a vocabulary word. Well, this sickly ESOL student had bottled it up long enough. It was time to pop the cork and out it came. I looked at her and said, "What, was that Ms. Vagina?" I'm wasn't sure of her name--I only remember that it sounded a lot like the word for one of the female body parts that I had just learned in health class. She didn't find my question as humorous as the class did and sent me to the office. My father never said a word to me and when we left the office that day he made sure that that was the last time I had to walk into an ESOL class. On Monday morning I began regular classes and decided to swim the very best I could and try not to sink.

I really believe that these experiences are what brought me to bilingual education.

Looking back at the first time I walked into Mrs. Carmona's kindergarten classroom at Martin Luther King Jr. School #9, I remembered feeling like a kid walking through a carnival even though I was an adult student in college: not knowing what to look at next, trying to take in all the sounds and smells, and wanting to do it all. There was color-coded language everywhere on the walls, chalkboards, and on the tables--red words for Spanish and blue words for English. I inquired about this and Mrs. Carmona said that Spanish and English look the same and that the color system was a way to visually distinguish the two to young learners.

There was an assistant in the room who took over Mrs. Carmona's place when I arrived. When the assistant responded in Spanish to one of the students, Mrs. Carmona gently reminded her that it was English week. I inquired about this too. She commented on how she alternates each language weekly to foster language development in the students' second language. Amazed, I asked if I could observe the rest of the day. She complied and I stayed. During naptime Mrs. Carmona took time out to show me everything from school District requirements such as portfolios, to curriculum philosophies that she supported. When I was ready to leave, I stood at the door in the hallway and peeked back in. I watched as the students gathered around Mrs. Carmona as she picked up a book and began to read it to them. For a minute I pictured Mrs. Dvorin sitting in the minute chair--I knew I was coming back.

Two years later, I was doing my bilingual student teaching in Mrs. Carmona's room. I had taken a leave of absence from my previous placement at Andrew Trahey School and went full-time to finish my elementary certification with a bilingual extension. I learned so much from the nurturing environment that Mrs. Carmona provided for those

little bilingual children. There were days I didn't want to leave. Mrs. Carmona gave me the confidence that I needed in order to use my third language, Spanish, without the challenges that I faced when learning my second language, English. Most important, she gave me a renewed outlook on teachers--not all of them are monsters. Some of them are like Mrs. Dvorin.

So, I became a fourth-grade bilingual teacher at School #9. Every day I challenge children in a different way: to walk around, jump over, or knock down those bi-lingual or bi-cultural barriers as students of English as a second and other language. I greet each one with a smile, welcome them into our school family, and provide them with a risk-free environment that Mrs. Dvorin would be proud of.

*“When I’m in Portugal I feel American
and
when I’m in America I feel Portuguese.”*

Jose Flores, age 48

American Autumn

My mother called me today. She sounded sad. I asked her what was wrong and she answered, “Your father took down the back door.”

I didn’t know what to say. Quietly I said, “He did?”

I could picture her nodding as she continued, “I’m going to keep the key as a remembrance.”

“I will too. Why don’t you get it framed in one of those shadow boxes and put it up?” I replied.

She let out a big sigh and said, “That’s a good idea, maybe I will.”

When I hung up I walked over to my key rack and took down my key chain. I felt the hard metal skeleton key between my index finger and thumb and realized that my cross-cultural world had shifted. The brick-red back door that hung on its hinges faithfully and swung open dutifully was gone. For thirty years I had used that skeleton key to open that door so that I could walk into my warm Portuguese kitchen after being out in a different cultural setting. I don’t need to do that anymore. I have assimilated--I no longer fluctuate between two worlds, instead I walk through different paths in the same world. I did it.

I did it because of the common thread, the pursuit of not only happiness and wealth, but of maintaining our cultural roots. I did it because the skeleton key that opened the back door to our American home was the key to endurance in a bicultural world. My parents were not the only ones who struggled to maintain a balance that separated these

two worlds. The second generation, mine, also wrestled between the tight hold of the Portuguese world offered at home and the remote backyard of the American world.

But now, like the summer green leaves that wait for cold crisp air, I wait for autumn. I wait for the moment when I can catch golden leaves in my hand. I love the time of year when the trees turn all shades of bright colors. I loved the moments when Marco and Miranda were little and I used to kneel in a pile of leaves that Mark would so carefully rake, grab a handful and toss them in the air. I would wait to hear the shrieks of glee. Then we would roll across the lawn with leaves fastening to our ecru fishermen sweaters. Now I love the day that I have to pick up Marco at Ithaca College. The drive along Cayuga Lake during autumn is breathtaking. I take mental pictures of the bright red sugar maples and the multi-hued shagbark hickory trees.

When we first came to the United States and experienced Fourth of July we were amused at how people reacted to the firework display of our city. We come from a town in Portugal that takes pride in its firework shows. The entire thirty-minute display above the ocean is like the five-minute grand finale of Rochester's fireworks presentation. So for us to see people blurt out "ooh" and "ahh" at every pop with thirty-second intervals was amusing. Whether here in Rochester, or in Albany, New Jersey or in Syracuse, depending where our family was, it became a family inside joke when we would all sit on a blanket or lean against the hood of the car watching the fireworks to "ooh" and "ahh" along with every one else as we winked at each other, knowing the display was not really as impressive as ones in Portugal.

Now I am like the other "oohers and ahhers." As I look at Cayuga Lake ringed with freckled alder and red-feather sumac, and aspens that shower gold into the rippling

water, I blurt out “Ooh.” When I go for walks in my neighborhood with my daughter or across the field when we watch Marco play soccer at Aquinas, the overflowing beeches and caramel-colored quivering aspens seem to bend over, welcoming us into the vibrant path and I blurt out, “Ahh.” When I drive into Brockport along the canal and watch islands of leaves float in the quiet water, spreading the hues of glistening reds into the rays of the sunset oranges, I can’t help but exclaim, “I love fall.” My family has grown accustomed to these outbursts; this amuses my friends, too, and now Miranda joins me in declaring that autumn is her favorite season too.

Portugal doesn’t have a dramatic change of seasons as does Rochester. I don’t know why I never appreciated this growing up in upstate New York. Now I wait for the fall and also wait to go to Portugal for the summer. The process of waiting for summer as a young adolescent into waiting for autumn as an adult happened subtly and I’m not aware of when the change occurred. I have assimilated. I know this, not only because I have grown to love my American life-style, but also because of how I feel now when I go to Portugal. It is different for me. It will always be my home--I will always toss my coat on a chair when I walk into our flat and breathe in the aromas. But what has changed is the way I am perceived. I am the American cousin now. My colors change too.

As Portuguese as I may feel here in Rochester, I am an American when I go home to Portugal. It may be the American accent that lays heavily on my Portuguese words or maybe it’s the style of clothing that screams New Yorker, but whatever it is, I know that to my family in Portugal I am not hyphenated, I am simply the cousin raised Portuguese who is an American. My Portuguese or American passport has no affect on their insight or opinion. Where citizenship is such a sensitive issue for Portuguese immigrants in the

U.S., it is not for the native Portuguese.

I haven't worried about this newly acquired awareness, as I did during the years of whether or not to naturalize. I noticed it happening, but wasn't bothered by it. My cousin Juni once said to me, "I was born in South Africa like you, and when my parents decided to move back to Portugal when I was thirteen, it was difficult. I was afraid of being shunned socially and having problems academically. But my friends and family helped me realize that it didn't matter that I was South African, what mattered was that Portugal was my home." Maybe my family also helped me recognize this ever so faintly every time I vacationed there.

I can think back and hear the words of encouragement, "Come again for a month next time. Three weeks isn't long enough to spend with your family." Or other times: "Open a bank account here and put money monthly into it so when you come on holiday you don't have to travel with money." I would respond, "Okay," and nod, smiling. They would pat me on the back and say, "We understand." My red-brick colored backdoor swings wide open and I stand in its threshold looking into the home I know so well and glancing out at the land that I have come to love. My family knows and now I do too that even though I see my world through the eyes of a Portuguese immigrant, I now use the words through the voice of an American citizen.

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