

Growing in all directions

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"For I know the plans I have for you", declares the LORD, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future". (Jeremiah 29:11)

I don't remember the exact day I mentioned the verse above for the first time, but I am sure they were the first words I wrote on my dissertation in Austin, TX, and the last words of my farewell party speech. So it will be the first words on this report.

When I was moving to USA I knew about the great responsibility that was travelling with me. It was not just Vera who was travelling, but my adviser, my university, CAPES, and my Country too. This way, when I arrived at Chicago Airport, I felt the weight of that responsibility and also how crazy I was. Yes, I was crazy because at Chicago Airport Customs Area, I realized how bad my English was. I could understand quite well the people, the 'Customs Officer', but to speak.... nothing when out of my mouth correctly...

The Officer, an unknown Afro-American man, who had sweat running into his face and eyes that spoke louder than the words coming out of his mouth: "No come back!!!" His eyes fixed on mine for only a second and new words echoed: "Go!! Go! Go!"

I had forgotten my baggage at customs area, so I was not supposed come back to pick them up. At that moment I felt welcomed, because the policeman understood me allowing me to retrieve my goods.

To perceive at that exactly moment that my English wasn't good was very important for me. So I could plan my studies, my routine and my life more acuity. I could learn how to observe more, listen more, and pay more attention in the things, in the people, in looks and whispers. I improve my perception about the human

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nature. This way, beyond scientific knowledge, which I was to seek, I could improve myself as a person.

Studying abroad, living abroad is a unique experience which takes advantage of growing in all directions (including the body mass, 11 pounds more on my body weight).

I can say: I used all my time to learn, either at the university or at a bus stop.

In the University of Texas at Austin – UT - I could attend four courses. In all of them I could observe how professors plan their classes. All of them are thoughtfully prepared. I met myself and realized me with this practice. I perceived that I was not alone, because I thoughtfully prepare all my classes too. The improvisation was not part of my teaching practice in Brazil and certainly the practice of planning my classes would be much more improved on my return to Brazil. In fact, now working as a professor in the Master's degree Program, I appreciate further planning my classes, because I perceive here in my students what I saw there in my American classmates, who came prepared for the classes. They read the materials previously requested by the professor which made the lessons more dynamic and productive.

I studied a lot for the classes at UT. There is a monitor program for students in the University, so I applied for the program to improve the writing of my texts. Diana was my monitor at UT. She helped me a lot correcting my writing, so my texts could be better presentable. Diana still writes me e-mail sometimes.

The doctorate classes in the UT helped me to improve my teacher practice and my knowledge too. However, to my research, what helped me more were the books and the articles from the UT library. The library was wonderful for me, mainly because I could take home as many books as I wanted. Once I found myself with more than 30 UT library books at home.

My computer doesn't remember how many papers it kept and I don't remember how many papers I read. But, the quantity of the books I remember because I did a list: I read 33 books in less than ten months. Many times my head was boiling and the information and ideas clashed on my mind, then I would go to walk or tour.

The moments of walking were many and each one with its specificity. Walking alone in my neighborhood, to feel the roses' smell, hear the chanting of croaks (black birds) and see the squirrels running calmed my mind.

One day, during a walk, I met René, a special woman. She took me to lunch and shopping at the Mall, also showed me the UT with the eye of the outsider, a look of someone who was a student there. She lived in the University dormitories and knew all the possibilities in the University. It was very good for me, because I knew René on my third week in Austin when was on spring break (vacation time).

I was in a Baptist church at Easter and it was wonderful. I was greeted by Virginia there. She introduced me Carolyn. Carolyn gave me her phone number, address and said that she and her family were, from that time on, my Austin family.

Every Sunday I drank coffee in the church, participated in Bible study and sang in the church. Often after Mass, I went to lunch with Molly, a bible group participant. She made me wonderful biscuits... took me to walk in the museum, parks...

We, in the bible group, had many meetings. I liked and I felt happy, secured and welcomed.

In the Baptist church I also knew Judith. She teaches Spanish at high school and English to Chinese immigrants at the Church. I was the only non-Chinese in the group. Judith's group was good; we talked during an hour every Thursday. Judith wrote poems for me.

I knew Elizabeth too. The biweekly picnic with Elizabeth's group was pleasant, including great ice cream and watermelon. Sometimes Elizabeth met the friends in her home. They were nice times.

In the Conscienciology church I practiced English language pronunciation with Caddy and a man whose name I cannot recall, but I remember that he used to tell me: "repeat, repeat again".

Although I took English language classes to improve the idiom, they also brought me many friends and allowed me to go to different touristic places at Austin. It was unforgettable time. During 35 day I got English lessons at a school called the House of Tutors, there I could meet teenagers from different countries.

This experience made me understand or realize that the problems we have in the high school in Brazil are the same in all countries. We used to have lunch together sharing and tasting different flavors and aromas. I “adopted” an Italian boy and a Vietnamese girl as sightseeing partners: Tomasso and Thai.

I also studied English language at a community college. There I met Barbara, the teacher. The way she taught allowed me to experience new ways of teaching and learning. Her care and attention captivated me. We keep in touch with each other. I send her children's books in Portuguese. My English was getting better every day. The students were more mature working people, for this reason, the classes started at 7a.m. I used to take two buses to go to the community college. The drivers, a man and a woman, talked with me about different subjects; after all I was the only passenger on that time of the day.

I participated in many potlucks with my classmates from the University, from the Church and from the English language classes. I made lemon cake to bring. I ate a lot; because I proved the different foods (explained my extra 11 pounds). I did also, a course in American cuisine, many and delicious recipes! That Sweet Morning! Sweet Banana Pudding! Sweet Pounds!

I had also many very good moments with Professor Bettina, a visiting Professor from my University in Brazil PUCRS, and her son Thomas. We have a lot of fun and we walked and learned. We got to know each other and built a good friendship.

We, Bettina and I, participated in several scientific meetings, in Austin, Michigan, and Mexico. I presented few scientific works in English. Barbara helped me with the PowerPoint presentations. I think I paid some monkeys! But, this was part of the learning process.

I lived very good moments at Austin. I felt well there, it is a very nice place. I could link study and fun. I did not worry about cleaning the house or other problems of everyday life, because I lived alone in a small studio. Had a single cup, a single plate, and a single pot... And needed nothing else... It was fine for me. I am a simple person and I don't need much to live. The most wealth is transforming the acquired knowledge into wisdom. I'm still learning how to do this.

Believe me, the Vera that was for Austin not returned. The other Vera came back. Obviously, that we aren't today that we were yesterday. However, the background developed there, never, would be developed anywhere else. Of course, there were difficult times, there were stones on the road, but living with wonderful people, strengthened me and made me believe more and see the people's good side. Feeling the warmth in small gestures, such as the initials of my name embroidered in a purse, as a chair at the table waiting for me and my name on a Christmas tree and ...

I brought a huge background, but also brought the culture, the affection... So I must finish this report with the parting words read by me in the great family that I left there:

"I have finished one more stage of my life here, and so, at this moment I want to share with you all what I have lived through while studying here at UT-Austin.

I can conclude my research. I had many experiences in the university, with my professors, classmates, staff and tutors. I learned a lot. This was very important for my career. But, there are other issues that are very important to my life, not only for my profession. GOD IS IMPORTANT TO ME!

The Lord leads me and guides me along the right way, so I am here with you now, in this moment, because here is the right place.

There are aspects in life that promote learning through feeling, loving above all studying.

I am very happy and grateful for everything that I have experienced and felt here. I felt at home, and it strengthened me, helped me to keep up with confidence and balance in my research.

I want to say thank you, and I will never forget you all.

You live in my heart, and my house, in Brazil, is open to you all.

"For I know the plans I have for you..."

Thank you, Very much!"