

LIVING FAR AWAY FROM HOME - "GOD SQUEEZES BUT DOES NOT HANG"



Since I was born in 1963, I always had a very complicated life, but at that time I was also happy with what my mom could give me. I am the daughter of a single mother and unknown father, with a brother a year and a half older than me. My grandparents ordered my mother to go away from home, with a child of one year and three months old and still six months pregnant with me. My anonymous father knew about this, and rented a room in Árvore - Vila do Conde, where I finally was born. I remember the first house where I lived: there were rabbits, chickens and a garden where we played. I also have some memories of the road we walked on our way to the beach.

When I was two years and a half, my mother came back to my grandparents' house at the village of Fradelos, in V. N. Famalicão. The landlady of the previous house, at Vila do Conde, still came to visit us sometimes. But with time, everything was forgotten. I do not know if it has to do with the big shock that I felt, but today I still know exactly how the house where I was born was like and everything that was inside it.

I start living in the village with my mother, brother, grand-parents and uncles (which were a slightly older than me). At home, with so many people, I was only a little girl for some, but for others was the niece who had to do everything they order, if not, they might beat me. My grandfather was a very ill person and could not walk far. He was always sitting. He used to put me in the middle of his legs and didn't let anyone beat me. At the time I was a child there was no time for adults to play with us. So, when we worked, we pretended we were playing: to bring firewood for the fireplace, feeding the chicken, etc.. In the morning, my mother worked in the fields, but by the afternoon she had another job to support us: she leave for a textile factory, which manufactured fabrics. Working at the looms, my mom always arrived home exhausted of being standing all afternoon. But in spite of this, she was a very cheerful person.

At that remote time, we had no toys and everything was good for playing: pretending to be a horse pulling the plow, chasing chickens... Until one day, when I fell on the top of a plow and made

a hole in my tongue... I was never quiet, I climbed everything I could. I even got an infection and only was allowed to drink. My tongue swelled so much that nothing was going down. But we just didn't visit the doctor, as there was no money.

At the age of five my paternal grandfather, who was also my mother's godfather, died and we all went to his funeral. When we enter the door... my anonymous father was there with a brother. As soon as his eyes laid on us, immediately he put us out of door. This is one of the things that I will never forget. I did not want to know more about him, because this is not to be done to a child, especially his daughter. And when someone told me: - "Look! This is your father." - I replied that I did not care. I've never spoken with him nor did he want to know about us.



The years went by and I went to the primary school that was located nearly two miles from the house where I lived. «- Whether it's raining or shining, you have to go to school» - used to say my grandmother. When I arrived home at the end of the school, I had to work on the farm and take care of the cows in the fields or in the hill. I was so small... and very afraid

that someone came along and might hurt me. Before time, it was a custom for men to go up the mountain to see if someone was robbing their wood and for this they dressed very ugly... sloppy and dark clothes. I always asked my brother to go with me, but he had to do other things. Therefore, as I was afraid, most of the time I did not lead the cows to the mountain and rode with them along the paths to grazing on the grass that was there. Because of this, I was beaten once and again.

My grandmother used to raise pigs, and one day, when I was arriving from school, one of these animals entered the kitchen. It was one of those kitchens in the old Portuguese way, earth beneath our feet, with a fireplace and wood-burning oven where the bread was made once a week. They order me to take the pig out and I started running after him. What for me was a funny game, suddenly became a small tragedy. The animal went over the fireplace and turned off a pot of boiling water on my feet. And there I was, with my little feet all burned. While they took my boots and socks off, they were all cooked already. But this did not stopped me from going to school, because I was obliged to use my aunt's shoes and: - «You! Go to school. »

So it was during the primary school, with many other things, some good and some bad (for that time). We played with anything! We made boats with pine wood rolls and with a simple clapboard was a car. One day, my mother went for a walk and brought me a little doll, hard plastic and naked. So I grab in fabrics and made her clothes. I was very happy because, finally, had a doll like so many other girls. Since my childhood I learned to do everything, because it was required. And between school, the homework and the fields, I had to cut the corn crown. However, as I was not enough high, because corn grew stronger, I did lots of strength with my little hands to bend the stem. Then, I cut two fingers. The pain was too much and I passed out.



And so it was my life. At that time, there was no transportation. I had to walk four kilometers to get to school during two long years. I always enjoyed having a bike, and as there was no money to buy it, I used my mother's and aunts'. But I did not reach the seat and have to ride it standing up. Then, my mother bought a motorcycle and I learned to ride it. I've always been a child who liked to know how to do everything. My mother sometimes left up to me and my brother to go to school using it. We were so happy!



I wanted to pursue my studies. My mother, with great effort because she had two sons, let me go to the secondary. Even so, I had to walk twenty minutes to catch the bus. I came to the same secondary school I am now (D. Sancho I Secondary School). It was a great effort to study and do the house and field work at the same time. I got up many times at four in the morning to study, because at night I arrived home and had to make dinner, as my aunts were already married, my grandmother didn't like to cook and my mother worked until ten o'clock at night. On vacation and when I was allowed, I went to my cousin's to learn embroidery and sewing on the machine.



As I grew up, I always worked in everything. I found time where there's no was it, embroidering, sewing, was a catechist, sang in the

choir and danced in a folk group. All the money I earned while I embroidered reverted to the home and family. As I always liked children, I became catechist and started to sing in the church choir.



As I have an uncle who played the accordion at the folk group of the parish and I liked to dance, decided to join him. My mother also started to sing and dance in the group. In summer, all week-end we were invited to dance at parties or parades of folklore groups.

Since child I always said that once I was grown up I must go abroad. I studied until the 11th year of the Secretariat course and that's when I met the one that is my husband. This boy, who had arrived from Rhodesia, lived with his family at his grandparents' house and began studying at the same school as me. We used to go home together on the same bus, because we lived in the same parish. We were always surrounded by friends, but the attention between us was different. His parents went to Venezuela because had family there and when he was eighteen decided to join them. We wrote to each other and sent photographs during two years and a half. At the end of 1982 he sent me a letter asking me to get married in the next summer. His mother came to me to see if I agreed, because he could not come to Portugal. When September 1983 came, I married him and so began a life together.

My husband first went to Venezuela to get the papers. It took a month and a half and then I travelled towards an unknown country! I was very anxious about going abroad and had never traveled by plane. A man I knew would give me the passport in Lisbon and the missing papers. Already at the airport, the hours began to pass and I found myself all alone, without the travel documents. I was so nervous that I started to vomit. It was near midnight when a doctor gave me some pills, because the trip was going to last eight hours. Finally, appeared that man with the passport and the rest of the papers.

It was a very large plain, a jumbo, coming from other countries, completely full and took off two hours earlier than expected. What a so long journey! Never reaching the destination! Imagine

arriving in an unknown country, not knowing the language and have no one waiting for me, because I should be arriving at eight and there was six in the morning. Finally, my husband came with her father, an uncle and a friend.

At first, everything was well, but the days went by and I started to miss Portugal, because my husband went to work and I was home alone. As I always have been adventurous, I took a bus and travel to visit the city where his uncles lived, 50km far, which were the only people I knew. It was seven thirty in the morning when I arrived and rang the bell. They saw me and did not believe I had gone there all alone!



The village where I lived was Puerto Cumarebo nearby the Caribbean Sea, with almost hot water. Children and people were always semi - nude with slippers in the feet. Most lived in ugly houses made of blocks and sheets of plate, but very clean. The people were very familiar and happy. They were always ready to help and shared the little they had for others to feel good.

So, the days went by. They invited us to parties, and for whatever reason they made a feast, being happy and enjoying seeing other people happy too. I started to meet friendly people, who did not envy anyone. I felt like really missing my family and friends, but these people filled me with sincere affection, welcomed me as my real family or even more.

A year and a half of being there I get pregnant, but this joy was short-lived: I lost the baby. Alone with my husband, my father had returned to Portugal, and had no one, but the neighbors, that helped me a lot. They waited that my husband left to work, not to interfere in the couple, brought me breakfast and cleaned up my house. Having an abortion was worse than having a son! It was a wonderful people, willing to do everything for the ones they care well, despite any race.

After two months of losing the baby, my husband got another job in a metalworking shop and went to another town 150 km far. Again, I had to get acquaintance with this new city and people. In reaching Punto Fijo, my husband had to do an operation and I, alone, had to walk with him to

various places, knowing nothing or nobody, no family to help me. It was a very tough situation. Many people do not understand us and think that life abroad is easy! We began to work in the same workshop. I, as secretary, and he in charge. This was the hottest city in the country. There were lots of foreigners, because there existed one of the largest oil refiners in the world. A few months later it was my time to be operated in the chest and, again, we were both alone, as always. A friend that I've left in Cumarebo came to help me. Already recovered, I got back to work.



The following year, 1986, I came on holiday to Portugal. We missed everybody! How wonderful to see my country and my people! When I returned to Venezuela, I became pregnant again and had to stop working. The doctor said I had to have rest. All my free time was spent near the sea, with that warm water. Also we travelled to see the country. Finally it was born my first child. I stayed home to take care of my son and was doing manual labor for people who asked me.

In 1988 I came to Portugal for the wedding of my brother. I could see my family, but soon came back to my normal life. When my son was just over one year we went to watch an autocross race. A gentleman who worked with my husband was a pilot and invited us. There, on the runway, at the end of the race, someone asked who were the ladies who dared to make a run and our friend called me by the loudspeaker. In America, at that time, the cars were almost entirely automatic, but what we had was synchronistic. Therefore, I had never seen such a car, but I was let alone to drive it. I ran the car of our friend and got to the finals in 2nd place. They created a contest for ladies since then.



Thus began another era of my life: autocross run at the national level. My husband opened a metalworking shop with a partner and began to manufacture a car for me to run. In 1989, we ran a few times, because it took time to build the car, but I was in third nationally place. At the end of the year, we went to Caracas to the awards ceremony, where were all the riders racing in Venezuela.

The following year everything was going well until I got pregnant again. After being home for three



months, I lost the baby. Afterwards, I continued to run autocross and stayed in second nationally place. What joy, when announcing a Portuguese to run those cars! Most of the Portuguese just wanted to make money and do not bother to participate in the cultural life of that country. In this career I knew many cities, people of all races, colors, religions, being old or new. The following year I got what I wanted: the first place. I was famous, known all over the country, in newspapers and television.

In the year 1991 we bought our house. We did not have much money and pay it on credit. It was a new house and very quiet. I also took an English course. Next year, pregnant again, I had a daughter. Since there, I ran alone, because my husband became ill with kidney problems, and could not.

In 1994 we came on holiday to Portugal and also went to Germany where we have family. We returned again to Venezuela and the following year sold the car for autocross. When there was autocross or racing motocross in our area, the Autoclub organized everything, and I was always one of the controllers of the pilots. I too started to inscribe my kids in swimming and rode with them from one side to the other, taking part in competitions. In 1996 I decided and enter in a computer course. It was undoubtedly a very happy life. Just took care of my children, husband and home.

Again, we came on holiday to Portugal in 1998 and spent three days at the Expo-Lisbon. When we returned to our normal life Venezuela started to get really bad with crime and kidnappings. Even so, it was still possible to go where we wanted.

Then, the year 1999 came with lots of rain, overflowed rivers, rock slides and land that lowered from the hills and took everything in its path, people, houses, cars, etc. There were almost no problems the place I lived, but on the central coast everything was buried under the rubble or been swallowed by the sea. Thousands and thousands of people, families and others were killed.

The president spread the homeless people across the country, but many have become delinquent. They had no work and neither did anything to achieve this, it was easier to steal and kill. This year I took a hairdressing course, because I was always interested in this profession and was curious about. I learned cutting, styling and paint, but never exercised because there were many hairdressers in the area.

When calm returned, there was the oil strike and then it was the end of a country that had everything, but that offered no security for a peaceful life. There was no work, schools were closed and the streets were filled with people doing marches against each other and in favor of what was happening. The situation began to get so tense that everyone wanted to escape from that insecurity. People wanted to go abroad, even the ones born in the country. At this time I was a secretary of a sports and cultural association and participated and helped out with whatever was needed. Since it was a beach area, we were going to the beach and even participated in fishing competitions.

In 2001 I again came on holiday to Portugal. I was very nervous. There had been killed many of our acquaintances, some for theft and others for revenge. There were murdered two children from a Portuguese couple and I became more nervous, because I also have two children and would not support something like this could happen to my family. My husband came to Portugal next year to study the situation and I stayed there with my two children, waiting for news. I was afraid that something happened.

As things were not improving in Venezuela, the following year we thought: «Now it's time to return to Portugal or to stand here». We decided to come back. The decision was also about to give my children the necessary tranquility to study. It was necessary to bring all school papers in order. We had to pay big money for everything to be quick and cool. These two months were the saddest of my life. Leave my things that were purchased with such relish, having to leave everything behind ... We had friends who were more than brothers and I couldn't believe that we were returning to Portugal. I cried a lot and today, I still cry at how happy I was in Venezuela. It was all there. I went to that country with twenty years old and returned with forty. It was necessary to start all over again, but now with two children and, after all, having nothing.

We came to Portugal in September 2003, a week before classes begin. We started living in the same house where I grew up. The house was very cold and when it rained I had to walk with buckets to catch the drops that fell from the ceiling. And so we were accustomed, but with much sadness because of my children. We never complained about anything, because I always told them how my life had been here.

A month after arriving in Portugal, someone told me that a ballet school in Famalicão, required a person to transport children. I came to the interview and started working. It was the perfect job for me as I like driving so much. But despite everything is going well, I felt emptiness inside me. People were not like 20 years ago.

My kids got used to live here and never took negative classifications at school, which for me was a pride. After two years we decided to buy a house on credit, because like most people, we had no money. Finally, I managed a home for us all.

At work, everything was going fine, until the boss began to ask me to come early and left later, earning the same. One day, I was so sick of doing everything alone, with great effort that told him I was leaving. He asked me to stay, that would fix things. At first everything was better, then continued all the same, working every day and no more else to help me.

The following year I had an accident with the car and get very nervous. I decided to go to a psychologist and I spent a week resting. Went to family physician, did all the tests and everything was fine with me, because what happened had to do with much work. I decided that the best for me would be to stop working there. They did not want me to leave, but when I decide something, I do it. I've always liked things right. Employees also are people like bosses and you cannot ask more than what you can give.

I got another job in a primary school, a support for children with multi-disabilities between 7 and 12 years. It delights me to work with these children, as they need lots of affection. We have to give them food, changing diapers, making them everything because they are immobile.

I went to visit Venezuela, my second country in July 2007. What a joy to see all my friends, some being more than my family! In late 2008 we sold everything we had there. During these last years I'm living in Portugal and met many people and I'm very happy, especially with my children. The oldest is in second year Master in U. M. and is going to be in training. The other is the 11th year in High School D. Sancho I. We have much contact with Venezuela and here in Portugal with people who came back like us. When there is a birthday party, we're all there to dance and talk about our lives in Venezuela.



After all, I have always two thoughts in my mind: «God squeezes but does not hang" and "Walking ever forward, no matter how slow it is». I want to be like the snail, slowly, and not as the crab, cause it runs very fast forward and suddenly also runs very fast behind. This is my life up to today. I am very happy with what I and my family could get from life and

hope we ever remain united in the good or the bad.

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