

Coming to Canada

By

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My Azorean Childhood

A long time ago I was born on an island right in the middle of the great Atlantic Ocean. My childhood years were spent in *São Miguel*, the biggest of the nine islands that make up the Azores. My family and I lived in the port city of *Ponta Delgada*, where Portuguese explorers arrived and began to populate the island in the 1430's. Our house was on the outskirts of the city, away from the ocean view and up toward the road leading out to other towns with names like *Arrifes*, *Fajã de Cima*, *Fenais da Luz*, *Ribeira Grande*, and far away *Nordeste*, where my father's family came from. Travelling along these country roads you would see miles and miles of blue *hortênsias* (hydrangea bushes), or *nevelões*, as we locally called the flowers that graced the sides of our dirt highways and overflowed from the black stone walls that separated the fields' one from the other.

Across from our house, there was a small farm with a cow pasture, surrounded by a wall made of black volcanic stones. The island, you should know, is volcanic, and although there had been awful earthquakes and eruptions centuries ago, in recent times it had been a safe place to live. As a little boy, I loved leaning on my parents' bedroom window sill on sunny days and watch the white and black jersey cows graze lazily on the field grass across the street.

In September, the time of the harvest, I would lean on the same window sill and watch the farmers cut the wheat and corn that had grown all summer long. Then, it would be taken away in big wagons drawn by sturdy big bull cows that swayed from side to side, chewing and drooling while carrying their big loads down to the busy market in the heart of the city. Every Friday, early morning, our street would come alive with the sounds of the visiting farmers who came down from the other towns with their cattle, their sheep and horses and carts filled high with hay to take to market. Again, I would go watch them from the window. Our sidewalk was so narrow that with all the animals and carts and the farmers with their black shawled wives walking down the street, it was impossible to stand outside our front door.

Cascading over the volcanic black stone wall across the street were beautiful small white roses with prickly green leaves. Sometimes I would walk over and pick some to decorate my little shoe box altar to the Blessed Virgin Mary. These I would then place in little vases on either side of the tiny altar. I made candles by rolling a long strip of coloured paper into tight round circles and then by pulling the paper up, I would form a candle. Flowers in place and candles

made, I was ready to play church. I tried to make my altar look just like the one found in the *Matriz* (parish church) of *São Sebastião* where I went to mass every Sunday. This beautiful church was many centuries old and still had its handsome Manuelino style doorway from the 16th century. The arches inside the church were made of caramel coloured stone set against stark white walls. The main altar was a magnificent baroque treasure. On either side of the nave there were many small side altars, all with niches elaborately carved out of rosewood with gold leaf and beautiful statues of saints in it: *Santo Antonio*, *São José*, and the loveliest of all, *Nossa Senhora de Fátima*, with a cascading array of roses on her altar, and tall candle sticks rising above the flowers, just like my little shoebox altar at home.

Every year, on the Monday after Easter, the *Procissão dos Enfermos* (Procession for the Sick) would pass by our street. The neighbours got up very early in the morning and made beautiful “carpets” out of flower petals and an assortment of coloured sawdust in intricate designs in the middle of our black cobbled stoned street. This was to honour the Blessed Sacrament that was carried by a priest who went to visit the sick of the parish to give them communion at home. He stood under a gold embroidered canopy carried by four men. The priest had a liturgical shawl around his shoulders made of fine silk and gold and he covered the base of the gold monstrance while he held it up to show the host inside of its round centre, radiating the Divine Presence. People would stand on the street to watch the procession then kneel as soon as the priest would pass by them. An altar boy would lead incensing the Blessed Sacrament and the clouds of smoke would envelope the canopy and the priest within it. It was all very sombre and magical.

There were many other processions, where groups of men wearing red capes called “*opas*” would carry the “*andor*” (a litter) on their shoulders supporting the statue of the Virgin Mary on it or other saints that were being honoured. Little girls dressed in angel costumes with big white feather wings attached to their back always took part in the processions. All the houses displayed their best *colchas* (bedspreads) made of silk or linen which would be draped over second floor window balconies, decorating the houses in an array of beautiful colours and designs.

Once the procession passed by, and the people went back into their houses, I would then go out into the street and gather as much of the coloured sawdust from the trampled decorated “carpets”. Afterwards, inside my enclosed yard I would make my own “carpets” of sawdust and play procession with my little *primos* (cousins) who lived with me. I would take the lead role, of course, and carry a big banner at the head of the procession, then Rita, Glauca, and their brother Manuel Angelo would follow me in great solemnity as we sang hymns to our Blessed Lady.

*A treze de Maio, na cova d'Iria,
apareceu brilhante a Virgem Maria,
Ave, Ave, Ave, Maria,
Ave, Ave, Ave, Maria.*

The biggest feast on the island was always after Easter when the procession of *O Senhor Santo Cristo* would take four hours to go through all the city streets followed by the “*arraial*” in *Campo de São Francisco* in the evening. That’s when the big brass bands played into the late

hours in the “*corete*” (a bandstand) and all the streets were decorated with colourful lights and garlands made of fresh flowers and paper lanterns. People came from all the towns of the island to attend the “*feira*” and to show their great devotion to the statue of the miraculous Christ, a gift to the island from Pope Paul III in the 16th century. The statue of the “*Ecce Homo*” is a bust of Jesus, with a crown of thorns made of gold, his bloody face looking at you with tenderness, his shoulders draped in a red fabric cape with gold embroidered on it, holding a golden sceptre in his tied hands.

The people look up to the statue with devotion, begging God to grant them healing and to cure them of all sorts of illnesses. Many women and men would crawl on their knees around the Campo de São Francisco, carrying gigantic tall *cirios* (candles) in their arms to “*cumprir uma promessa*” (to fulfil a promise) they made to Senhor Santo Cristo, if He granted them their wishes. The statue is kept in a beautiful convent covered with Portuguese blue and white *azulejos* (Decorative tiles), showing the life of a saintly nun, *Teresa da Anunciada*, who promoted the cult of the Holy Santo Cristo back in the 17th century. The last time I saw this special procession in *São Miguel* was when I was nine years old with my mother and my maternal grandparents.

Everyone who immigrated from the Azores, and especially from the island of *São Miguel*, brought their love and devotion of *O Senhor Santo Cristo* to wherever they went, especially to Toronto, where at St. Mary’s Church, there has been an annual feast and procession of *O Senhor Santo Cristo* since the arrival of the first immigrants in the late 1960’s.

Another important feast was that of *São João Baptista*, which took place every twenty-fourth of June. Each neighbourhood would celebrate the feast with street decorations and huge *fogueiras* (bonfires) lit in the centre of the street at night time. The brave boys and men jumped over these *fogueiras* for fun. I was never allowed to join in. But one thing I could do on the feast of *São João Baptista* was to gather *hortelã* (mint) and *alecrim* (rosemary) and other fragrant herbs and add them to a bowl of water that would be left outside overnight for St. John’s blessing. In the morning we would wash our faces with this cool soothing water and feel clean and fresh and holy.

As you may probably guess by now, religion was very important for the life of the Azorean people. Every day you could hear someone say in greeting, “*Até amanhã se Deus quiser.*” See you tomorrow, God willing; or, “*Vai com Deus.*” Go with God; and, “*Deus te Abençoe.*” God Bless you, as a response to children when they asked their parents for a blessing.

When I wasn’t playing processions, attending *festas*, or going to church, I enjoyed a regular childhood. For instance, under my parents’ bed, I kept a box of silk worms where they built their cocoons in the dark. I would walk up the street to a house that sold the right kind of leaves for a silk worm to eat. I knew that house sold it because, hanging outside the door was a leaf to let people know that you could buy it there. Other houses might have a “*couve*” leaf hanging outside the door to let people know that you could buy collard greens there to make “*caldo verde*” soup. After buying them, I would freshen up the silkworm box with the new leaves for them to eat. The silkworms would make tiny holes as they took little bites out of the tender green leaves. But it was the cocoons they made that were the most interesting to watch:

Round yellow cocoons, hidden in a shroud of sticky gauze material that the silkworm wove around the cocoon before it would break open to reveal the delicate butterfly inside.

I had a pair of rabbits given to me every summer. Every day I had to make sure that they got enough carrots and other vegetables to eat. I also had to clean out their big cage, which was always full of small black pellets. My two rabbits entertained me for hours and I even learned how to twitch my nose just like they did. My mother told me to stop doing that. Every year, in December, my mother would take me to the *Convento da Esperança*, where we delivered my poor little rabbits as a spiritual gift offering for the nuns in thanksgiving for St. Lucia who had cured me of an eye infection when I was a little baby. I wished we didn't have to give my rabbits away like this because I loved them so much. I had no choice but to give them up and wait for new rabbits the following summer.

I remember once when I had to be taken to the hospital to have my chin stitched up. It was laundry day and I was playing with the dirty sheets. The washing was done in the yard, inside a big tank where our family helper, Zélia, would scrub the clothes by hand and then hung them up to dry. The ground was all cement. I took a big white sheet from the dirty pile, wrapped it around my shoulders like a cape and twirled myself around, faster and faster, while the sheet floated in the air and I became very dizzy indeed. Boom, I fell down face first and cracked my chin open. I ran upstairs yelling for my mother. It felt like my chin was this big gaping hole, blood flowing everywhere. My mother panicked. “*Ai, Jesus,*” she screamed. She made Zélia go get my father right away. He drove me to the hospital where they stitched my chin. It was very scary, I don't mind telling you. Once the doctor froze my chin with an anaesthetic needle I didn't feel a thing.

On the way home, to make me feel better, my father stopped the car, and walked across the street to a toy shop where he bought me a little iron I had wanted for a long time. You see, at home, I liked to gather all the little scraps of fabric from my mother's sewing kit and I made little dresses and pants for my cousins' dolls. The toy iron was needed so that I could press the brand new clothes. I knew how to use a needle and thread because I watched my mother make all kinds of home made clothes, like dresses, shorts and shirts. In those days, most of the clothes you wore were made at home and not store bought. My mother was a great seamstress, or *costureira*.

School was a very serious place. We sat in neat rows of old fashioned desks that had a hole on top of the desk which held a porcelain inkwell. In those days, we learned to write with fountain pens and would always get our fingers stained with black ink that always spilled out from the nib. In drawing classes we used *aguarelas* (watercolours). A special uniform called a *bata* was worn and every morning we would stand at attention and sing the national anthem- *Heróis do Mar*, and said our prayers. We learned that the most important thing to do was to respect and obey our *Pátria* (our Country), and our *Santa Igreja Católica* (Holy Catholic Church).

Even at this early age, I loved books and very often had new ones bought for me. One day, when I was seven, while in a book store with my mother, I wanted her to buy me a particular book that she could not afford to buy. I got really angry when she said no; I stormed out of the store and walked all the way home from downtown to our house. On the way, I

walked passed my paternal grandmother who was shocked to see me walking alone without my mother on the busy streets of Ponta Delgada. “*Onde está a tua mãe?*” where is your mother, she asked. I lied and told her that I was sent home to get her rosary while she stayed in church waiting for Mass to start. My grandmother’s mouth dropped for she could not believe my mother would ask me to walk home alone. I kept on walking, never realizing that my mother was following me as fast as she could. When she got home, my mother was very angry and wanted to hit me with a sturdy clothes brush. Her mother, my maternal grandmother, stood in her way, protecting me as I hid under the table.

You see, both sets of *avós* (grandparents), lived with us. Upstairs, there were my maternal grandparents, Viriata and Manuel Duarte. My *avó* Viriata stayed at home and took care of the house. My *avô* Manuel was a *serralheiro*, a blacksmith, and called *Mestre Duarte* by his workers. I would love to stop by his *oficina*, his shop, after school to see the red hot iron tongs go up in smoke as they were plunged in the water to cool them down. Downstairs lived my paternal grandparents, Maria and Antonio. They came from the country, from far away *Achada*, in the district of *Nordeste*. My *avó* Maria made delicious country soups with *feijão* (beans), *couves* (collards greens), and other wonderful vegetables, with a touch of *chouriço* (sausage) added to the soups for flavour. I had a set of clay dishes that I bought during one of the *festas* and I would go into her kitchen and ask her to fill up my little pot with her hot fresh soup. My *avô* Antonio had been a barber back in *Achada* and a carpenter on the island of *Terceira* at the American Military base.

My aunt, *tia* Urania and her three children, my cousins, Rita, Glauca and Manuel Angelo also came from *Achada* to live downstairs in our house on *Caminho da Fajã de Cima*, while their father, *tio* Manuel Angelo worked on the big cruise ships that left the *doca* (the dock) of Ponta Delgada every few months.

By this time, my father had already left the island. I loved my father and my mother told me how much he loved me. He owned *Mercearia Esperança*, a grocery store, right across from the old church of *Santo André* and sometimes I would stay with him at the store and watch him work. One day in November, when I was six years old my mother told me that he had gone away to America but that I would see him again some day. I was so upset that I hid under the skirt of my mother’s Singer sewing machine table. I didn’t even have a chance to kiss or hug him goodbye. That was not fair! I didn’t understand why my father had to leave. My mother tried to explain he went away to find work so that we could have a better life. Why did we need to have a better life than the one we had already? I just wanted to be with my *pai*.

Soon I learned to live with the idea that my father was gone. I liked school and playing with my friends. I had a *pião*, that’s a top, and I would wind it up with a special string and then let it spin on the ground. This was fun. Or we’d play with marbles. But at home I would sit by myself and do drawings with my *aguarelas* or I would read one of my favourite books, *A Gata Borralheira*, *A Herdade da Branquinha*, *O Touro Azul*, *A Branca de Neve*, all in Portuguese. In the Azores we spoke only in Portuguese. Sometimes, I would hear English music coming from the juke box of the Café across from my school. The same year that I left the island, it was “*We all live in a Yellow Submarine*” that was being played. At that time I did not know who the Beatles were nor did I know their music. That came later when I came to Canada. My friends

and I liked to sing along to that English song even though we did not know what the words meant; we just liked the melody.

After my father left for America, my mother, and I would go out on Sunday afternoons to visit her fine lady friends. At these parties I had to wear my best suit and bow tie. Her friends' tea parties were very proper and grown up. I didn't mind going to them because there was always a table covered with delicious treats: everything from *pasteis de nata* (custard tarts) to *bolas de coco* (coconut balls) and marzipan shaped into *peras* (pears) or *laranjas* (oranges) or *morangos* (strawberries). Every kind of cake imaginable graced the table, like *bolo de ananás* (pineapple cake) and *bolo de laranja* (orange cake). It was all there for me to try, except the *licores* (liqueurs) made of varied fruits. Those were only for the ladies to drink.

One time, I was given a tea cup, a proper china tea cup to drink from. My mother taught me the proper way to hold it with my fingers and not my hands. The cup was very heavy and my fingers were very tiny. I almost let the cup fall down along with the hot tea but I tried really hard and was able to lift it up to my lips and take a sip without spilling a drop. And, even though we had eaten so many sweets by the end of the party, my mother always stopped on the way home at the *Pastelaria* to buy some hard sugar coated biscuits to share later with our evening *chá* (tea).

And so, for three years, while my father was in America working hard making money for us, I continued with my studies, doing my drawings, reading my books, and spending time with my friends. During this time, my paternal grandparents left for Canada, followed by my little cousins, *tia* Urania and *tio* Manuel Angelo. On the morning they left, I lay very still in bed *fingindo* (pretending) to be asleep. I could hear my little cousins' approach my bed trying quietly to give me a goodbye kiss. I just could not show them that I knew they were going away because I would have broken down and cried. After their departure our home felt empty with only my mother, my maternal grandparents and me waiting for my father to come back some day.

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Leaving for Canada

My father worked very hard doing all kinds of jobs in America and Canada. Starting out in New Bedford, Massachusetts, he worked pressing suits and tidying up the warehouse of his uncle Frank and aunt Penny, whom he lived with along with their little son, Chico, who had a dog. My father sent me a photograph of himself with this boy and his dog. I didn't like that picture. Seven months later, he crossed over to Canada by a bridge near Niagara Falls. He went to live with his sister, my *tia* Ilda, her husband, *tio* Angelo and their children, Berta Maria and Angelo. They had been the first of our relatives to leave the Azores.

In Toronto, my father worked in construction and, for the city, jack hammering cement near the street car tracks. He even worked for a time on a tobacco plantation near Georgetown.

But now my father was back in *São Miguel* to be with my mother and me. My father had been away so long that I almost did not recognize him. He was like a mysterious stranger returning from a far away place that I knew nothing about.

Soon afterwards, without my knowledge, he made plans to bring my mother and me to Canada where we would join my cousins, grandparents and my aunts and uncles. When the day came, we snuck out of the house quietly through the darkness of early morning without even saying goodbye to my maternal grandparents. It was raining hard and we carried suitcases down the wet cobbled stoned street. It was then that my parents told me we were going to Canada. I wanted to run away from my parents. I didn't want to leave my home, my friends, and my grandparents. I never was given a chance to take along any of my toys and books.

We walked all the way to the house of my mother's best friend, *Dona Lídia Viveiros*, where we silently changed into our travelling clothes. My mother had made a brand new dress for the trip and a good new suit for me. From there we travelled to the airport. In those days, the local people jokingly called the airport in *São Miguel* "*aero vacas*," as it was nothing more than a big field where cows grazed nearby. There was a little shelter room where we waited for a tiny *SATA* airplane to come and take us away. This was my first time ever seeing an airplane up close. The airplane was so small that it could only carry about 12 passengers. We walked toward the grass tarmac and climbed the stairs to get inside the airplane. I was very nervous about this new adventure and I wanted to stay by my parents' side for the flight. However, the stewardess escorted me to the very front of the airplane where I was to sit by myself behind the cockpit. "*O menino fica aqui*," she told me, "you stay here." As soon as her back was turned I ran back to my parents but was sternly brought back to my solitary seat in the front where I could see the pilot and his panel full of strange instruments. I was very scared, indeed.

Soon the engine began to roar and the small propellers began to spin round and round, the airplane began to move and then without any warning the little aircraft lifted from the ground and made its way up, up into the blue Azorean sky. By then I was so taken by the magical ride that I allowed myself to enjoy looking out of the tiny window and watch the greenest parcel of earth get farther and farther away from me until the sight of the blue hydrangea marking the highways blurred with the blue of the vast sky and ocean below. I wasn't scared anymore but I felt very much alone.

We landed very shortly on another island, *Santa Maria*. This was the island where the large jet airplanes landed and took off with immigrants to Canada. Something must have happened with the flight schedule or there must have been some engine trouble because we had to stay on this island for several days. We stayed in a hotel. It was wonderful. I had never been inside a hotel before. There was a huge dining room with big round tables decorated with linen table cloths and napkins and wonderful plates with rolls and butter. In the evening all the children staying at the hotel would get together and join the adults at the bar area to hear a singer and a band playing. It was lots of fun and a real adventure.

The day finally came for our departure. The Air Pacific airplane was 100 times bigger than the little *SATA* airplane that brought us to *Santa Maria*. This airplane was massive! I was

given a window seat next to my parents where I could always see a bit of land outside the window until I realized that what I was looking at was the long wing of the airplane.

We first landed in Montreal. It was February and we had to walk down a flight of stairs unto the tarmac before heading for the shelter of the airport. In my little cotton grey suit I could feel a cold that I had never felt before. And I saw something so foreign to me, snow: beautiful white snow, a blanket covering everything white. In *São Miguel* our winters were only rain and damp wet weather. Here, the snow covered everything. There wasn't a sign of green earth anywhere at all. To me, Canada was just grey and white and that was very strange to see.

From Montreal we took a connecting flight to Toronto. There were my cousins and my aunts and uncles and my grandparents waiting for us at the airport. I had not seen Rita, Glauca and Manuel Angelo for several years but they still looked just like I remembered them. I was so glad to see them that I forgot how much I missed my home in *São Miguel*. I was now so far away from the blue waves of our island's Atlantic Ocean where I was born and plunged into an ocean of waves made up of tall buildings, including the Toronto Dominion double towers, and long wide streets all lined up in a perfect grid going far into infinity; a world so large and expansive and flat like a calm ocean day, where everybody spoke English but me. I did not even know how to say "hello." I also met my other cousins, Berta Maria and Angelo. They had come over to Canada when they were very little and I never got to play with them back home. But now I would be living in Canada in their house.

My first year of life in Canada

When we arrived at our new home, in *tia* Ilda and *tio* Angelo's house, there was no place for us to stay but the basement. The house was already full of people. Upstairs lived *tia* Urania and *tio* Manuel Angelo, their three children, Rita, Glauca, and Manuel Angelo; our *avós*, and my cousins, Berta Maria and Angelo. Then you add my parents, Berta and Antonio, and me for a total of 14 people in one house! Somehow we managed to get along very well. I think all our parents were so happy to be together again that they did not mind living so close together.

Within a few days of arriving in Toronto, I was sent to school. Luckily, Charles G. Fraser Public School was just a few steps down from the house we lived in on Euclid Avenue. My cousins did their best to teach me some English so that I could get by on my first day but once I arrived in the classroom and the teacher began to ask me questions all I could answer in return was "my name is Emanuel Duarte Cabral de Melo." He kept asking me over and over again and the other children were laughing at me. During recess I asked the other Portuguese children what was so funny and they said, "Well, the teacher was asking where you live, how old are you, where do you come from, and all you kept answering was your name." I was sent to

special English classes for new immigrants so that I could learn to get along in my new country. I had to learn to make the “th” sound and learn about the letters w and y. It was all very confusing but after awhile I began to understand English.

When my class went out into the school yard to play baseball, I tried very hard to hit the ball with the baseball bat, but no matter how much I tried and no matter how hard the other kids encouraged me to hit it, I never did. We didn’t play baseball back in *São Miguel*, I had never seen a baseball bat in my life and, besides, I never cared for sports that much anyway. After that first try at hitting the ball, I didn’t go out to play baseball again.

I will never forget how I learned the meaning of “I Love You.” At home we had all watched a very good movie called “*Whatever happened to Baby Jane*”, where Bette Davis, who played the role of a mean sister, yells up to her sister who is bedridden, “I Love You.” The next day I asked my cousins what these words meant. They said it was nothing and that I should go up to my cousin Berta Maria, she was the oldest, and tell her “I Love You.” She was sweeping the front yard at the time and when I said it to her, she hit me over the head with the broom and my cousins laughed so hard but in good fun. After that, I could not say “I Love You” for a long time.

I was mesmerised by television. This was the best of Canada. We had no television back in the Azores in 1968. I was fascinated by all these little people, buildings and cars that somehow fit inside that little black and white box. Every night, after dinner, we would sit together and watch shows like *The Avengers*, *The Red Skeleton Show*, and *The Ed Sullivan Show*. On Sunday afternoons we watched *The Lawrence Welk Show* and *Tiny Talent Time*. Every Saturday night my father, my grandfather and uncles religiously watched *Hockey Night in Canada* while the women were in the kitchen baking or talking or sewing. As I spent more time watching television I discovered other shows like *Bewitched*, *Gilligan’s Island* and *I Love Lucy*. These were some of the shows that captured my imagination. The most magical TV moment of all was when we all sat hushed together and watched the first landing on the moon in 1969. There was never anything like that ever again.

Before the end of winter, I liked going outside into the garden and watch the snow start to melt. Snow was still mysterious and wonderful to me and I tried to taste it, surprised by its lightness and blandness. Snow muffled and hushed all outside sounds, creating a silence unknown to me back in *São Miguel* where street sounds were always loud and alive with the clicking and clacking of animal hoofs and people’s footsteps on the cobbled stones. In Canada, you heard the muffled swish of cars going up and down the street.

Six weeks after our arrival in Canada, my mother received a letter from her brother, *tio* Alvaro, who was also leaving *São Miguel* with his family for a new life in the United States. In the letter, he told her how my grandmother was very ill and wanted my mother to go back to *São Miguel* to take care of her. My mother was heartbroken. She had spent three years away from her husband and now she was being told that she must leave him again. It was the end of March, a Saturday, I remember, and my father cried and cried, inconsolably, for he was heartbroken about the possibility of living without my mother and me again.

When we arrived in *São Miguel*, my mother soon found out that *avó* Viriata was in good health again and did not need looking after. She became very angry for being forced to make this unnecessary and difficult trip back to the Azores and vowed that no matter what, she and I were coming back to Canada as soon as we could.

We stayed in *Ponta Delgada* until late June, while my father tried to come up with the money to bring us back to Canada. While there, I went back to my old school to finish the academic year. However, the six weeks spent in Toronto had already changed me and I felt like a stranger in my old classroom. I had already learned some English and now found it confusing going to English language classes because the English teacher in *São Miguel* did not pronounce words the way I remember hearing them in Canada. Years later, I realized that she was speaking British English and this explained why, at the time, I did not believe she was speaking real English.

We finally said goodbye to my grandparents and returned to Toronto on June 23, several days before my 10th birthday. When we arrived, there was such a big celebration of joy with the entire family in the Euclid Avenue house glad to have us back. My father, in particular, was overjoyed now that we were going to be together forever.

At the end of July we received a letter to inform us that *avô* Manuel Duarte had died of a heart attack a few weeks after we left for Toronto. By this time, my mother was already working and I was the one who opened my grandmother's letter to find out about the sad news before she came home from work. It was very hard for me to tell my mother that her father had passed away. My *avó* Viriata was very sad living alone and decided to come and live with us in Toronto. She arrived in September of that year and since there was no further room available in the Euclid house, my parents' bedroom in the basement was partitioned with a temporary wooden wall to create a narrow long corridor bedroom with two beds, back to back, in single file, which I then shared with my grandmother.

During that first summer in Toronto, Rita, Glaucia, Manuel Angelo and I went around the neighbourhood and collected pop bottles. They were worth one penny each and we always made enough to buy some liquorice sticks or a very sweet ice called a "Lola" which would take a long time to suck on so you really got your money's worth. One day, we made it all the way to Alexandra Park on Bathurst Street south of the Sanderson Library and begged the ice cream boy to let us have some ice cream for free. We teased him, laughed at him and made lots of noise. He was very annoyed indeed and said, "I wouldn't give you any ice cream even if you paid me." A few minutes later one of our relatives walked by and he bought us all ice cream even though the boy was really upset that he had to sell it to us.

Inside the Sanderson Library, newly built around the time of my arrival in Toronto, I began to choose new books to read, English books. I read all the Dr. Dolittle books, fascinated by the little man who spoke to the animals. My cousins and I got involved in doing puppet shows in Portuguese at the library. Our parents came to see us one day performing Snow White. There was a Portuguese librarian and she helped us to find books in our mother tongue while introducing us to books in English. Now that I look back, I can see how good it was to have that transition from the only language I knew to my newly acquired language. In either language, I

never lost my love of good books and I still read novels in Portuguese although now I read books in English, too.

My cousins and I would go over to the fire hall and watched the fire trucks leave the station. One day, we were standing there, trying to have some fun with the firemen, when their fire truck blasted with full sound, scaring us so much that we jumped up in fear and ran away.

We had many adventures that summer and we caused mischief whenever we could while our parents were busy at work trying to make a living and to save money to someday buy their own houses. *Avó* Maria, my mother and *tia* Urania went to work at a jeans factory called Carhart's. Every kid wore jeans back then but not the Portuguese children. Our parents would not allow us to wear them because back home we did not have jeans and our parents did not think we should wear them here in Canada, too. Later, my mother and *avó* Maria went to work at the Irwin Toys factory. My mother was responsible for putting the strings and wires inside the Etch-a-Sketch frames and the white knobs on the outside. This was hard work for my mother because back in *São Miguel* she had been a housewife and did not have to work outside the home. In Canada, we learned that everyone had to work to make a living.

The good thing with having my mother and grandmother work in a toy factory is that we kids all had our very own Etch-a-sketches and other toys to play with. My father worked at Neilson's Chocolate Factory on Gladstone Avenue in the Shipping and Receiving Department. He didn't make the chocolates himself but every Halloween and Christmas he would buy boxes of all the varieties of chocolates they made at the factory and gave them to me and my cousins as presents. I remember a particular chocolate I really liked that had coconut inside of it. My father was known as the chocolate man around our house. *Tio* Manuel Angelo was a shrewd businessman and he bought properties and then had his own restaurant where *tia* Urania went to work with him. *Tio* Angelo Dias worked for the City Parks and he was always good with plants and flowers. Only *tia* Ilda stayed home to keep an eye on us kids.

Living together in the same house did not last very long for our big family. Soon, my parents found an apartment on Manning Avenue, near Queen Street. Later, we moved into a couple of other apartments before they could afford to buy their own house near Brock and Dundas on Atkins Avenue. It was there that my brother Nelson was born several years later. *Tia* Urania and *tio* Manuel Angelo bought a house in "Corktown" at the end of a little dead end street called Wilkins Avenue. Sometimes, on Saturdays, I would take the King streetcar to go visit my cousins and it seemed so far away from the area we first lived in, later called Little Portugal because of the large number of Portuguese immigrants who settled there. My grandparents bought a house on Manning Avenue right behind *tia* Ilda's house on Euclid and we could go from one house to the other through the Charles G. Fraser school yard. This left *tia* Ilda's family all alone again on Euclid Avenue. But even though we all went our separate ways, we always remained close together.

Every Sunday our parents would take turns giving a big party for each other and there was much laughter and fun and great food all the time, especially when it was *avó* Maria's turn. She always had a tray full of *biscoitos* (biscuits), *malasadas* (a kind of fritter), and other treats for her grandchildren and she was only happy when her tray of goodies was empty. Our parents

tried to keep all the traditions of their island home alive; they still cooked the traditional meals, using *chouriço* (sausages), *morcelas* (blood pudding), *couves* (collard greens), *pão de milho* (corn bread), and *vinho* (wine) on the dinner table. They also attended all the *festas* and processions at St. Mary's Church on Bathurst Street, where all the Azorean immigrant families congregated, trying to recreate all the traditions of home, including the most important one of all, *as Festas do Senhor Santo Cristo*.

We children spoke Portuguese at home and English at school. My cousins and I had fun giving Portuguese titles to all the pop tunes we'd hear on the radio. We renamed all the songs we heard. Curtis Mayfield's *Superfly* became "*Super Mosca*"; *Stairway to Heaven* became "*Escada para o Céu*." We slowly and without knowing it learned to blend the tongue of our birth with the language of our adopted land. In time you would hear Portuguese conversations that talked about o "streetcarro" and then we forgot that the word for garbage is not "garbicho" but *lixo*. We began to form a new language, a mix of the old words with the new words and if people back home were to hear us they would have been shocked and disappointed in thinking that we were trying to show off. What they would not have known is that we began to forget some of the old words as we stopped using them. But it would take me a few years before I stopped thinking completely in Portuguese, and when that happened, the English language became the most prominent way for me to communicate and express myself to the world.

It wasn't so lonely coming to Canada, after all, with all my cousins and family close by. We all stayed in Toronto, and made Canada our permanent home. I remember how proud my parents were when they became Canadian Citizens and to this day my mother praises Canada for giving our family the best lives possible.

Forty years later, I still live in Toronto, now in the east end near the Scarborough Bluffs. Often, I walk the short distance down my street to the edge of the Bluffs where I can look down below and see Lake Ontario with its vast gentle waves. And when I lean on the fence, overlooking the lake, I am transported back to my childhood home – an island surrounded by an ocean that is wild and vast – an island with magical lakes, hot springs and geysers – an island with green gentle hills and roads overflowing with blue hydrangea bushes - an island rich in religion and colourful feasts – but most of all an island where I remember laughter and joy amongst family and friends in those early years of my childhood.

And every time I gaze out into the lake water I inevitably smell the salt sea air of my mid Atlantic Ocean home, and wonder if those old black and white jersey cows across from our old house are still there.

The End

(Or, to put it more accurately, the beginning of our lives in Canada)

Dedication

This story of my journey from my place of birth on São Miguel, Açores, to Canada, when I was just nine years old, in 1968, is for my brother Nelson, who was born several years after our immigration; and for his daughters, my darling nieces Emily and Madelyn who are the dearest loves of my life. This story is also for the wonderful children of my cousins so that they, too, may have a little glimpse of their Azorean roots.

Sadly, this year 2008, on the 40th anniversary of my arrival in Canada, my grandparents, aunts and uncles and my always loved father have all left us. Avô Manuel Duarte died of a sudden heart attack in São Miguel. Avó Viriata died after many years of being sick and bedridden. (I had spent my adolescent years accompanying my mother to doctors' appointments and hospital visits when my grandmother was sick and I became the official translator from English into Portuguese for my mother until she herself learned enough English to understand on her own.) Avô Antonio died while on a visit back in the Azores and he is buried in Achada as is tio Manuel Angelo, who went back to live in São Miguel after his wife, my beautiful tia Urania died of cancer before her 50th birthday. Our avó "Marquinhas," as my father endearingly called his mother, spent the last years of her life with Alzheimer's. Tia Ilda died suddenly after a short illness 9 months before my father, Antonio, died of brain cancer. Tio Angelo Dias died this year, suddenly, before he could cultivate his garden on Euclid Avenue. Our family experienced much joy and laughter over the years but we have also experienced much sadness and loss.

From their generation, only my mother, a minha mãe, Berta Pereira Duarte de Melo, remains. In some way I now live back in time with her as we did for those three years when my father was away and my mother and I lived alone without him. It is said that to everything there is a season and seasons come and go, as do the hypnotic waves of the great Atlantic Ocean where we all began.