

I Can't Wear My Plaqueta* Any More?

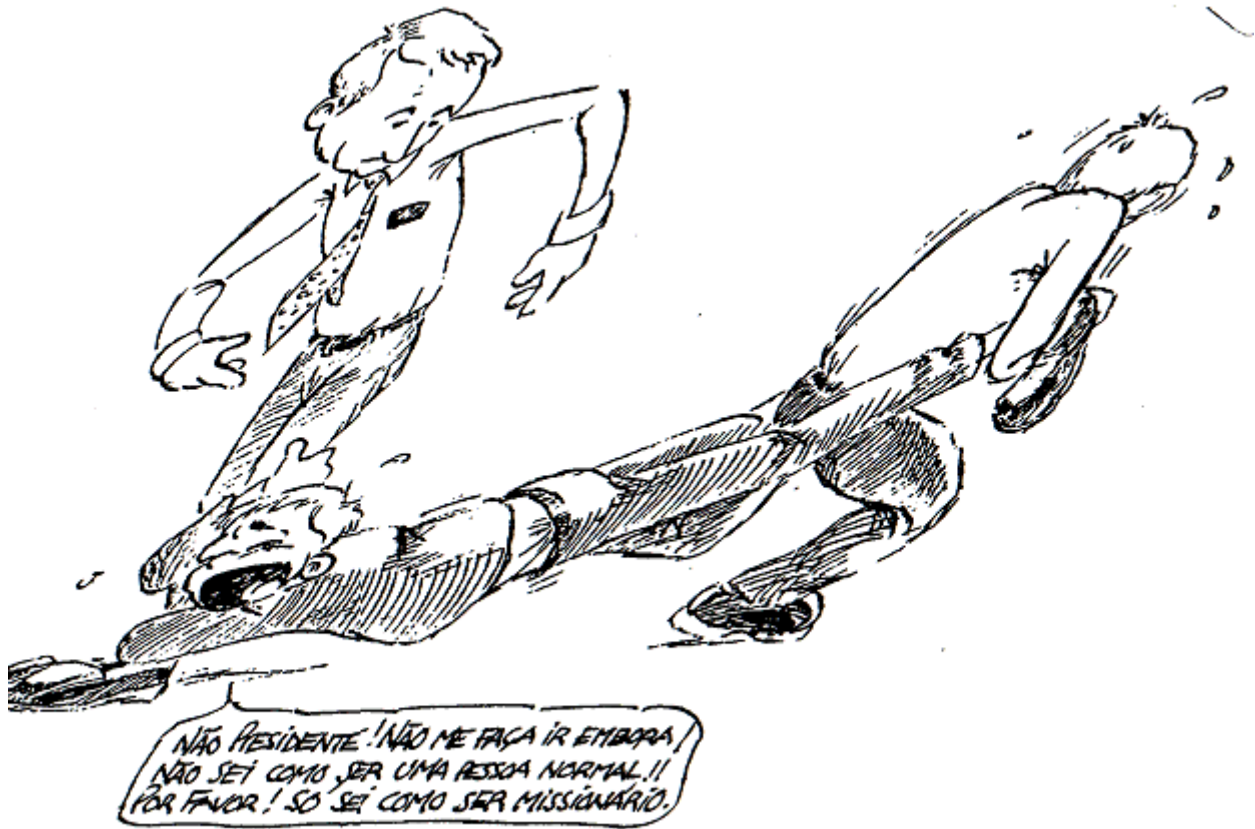
Adjustment Stories of the
Returned Sister Missionaries
from the
Brazil Curitiba Mission

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Winter 2002

*("Plaqueta" means "name tag" in Portuguese)

Dedication

As we each left the mission, we were given a book filled with our letters to the President and all of the mission newsletters for while we were out. At the front of the book is this picture with the dedication: "This book is dedicated with love to the people who leave a part of their hearts in the Brazil Curitiba Mission."



No President! Don't make me go away!
I don't know how to be a normal person!!
Please! I only know how to be a missionary.

I would like to dedicate this collection to all who have struggled to become "normal people," while at the same time knowing full well that they will never be normal again because of their experiences in Brazil.

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Cover Essay

We all expect to pass through culture shock to one degree or another when we go to a new country. We expect to feel out of place and uneasy with our new surroundings and customs. Missionaries are in no way immune to these feelings. For those Americans who served in the Brazil Curitiba Mission, they had to become accustomed to a new language, new food, new customs, new standards of living, and that was just being in the country. As missionaries they had to get used to being with the same person constantly, getting up early and going to bed early, studying the gospel more than they ever have in their lives, and talking to everyone they could regardless of how shy they felt.

They had rules that covered everything from what they could and could not eat – everything had to be cooked, boiled, or peeled – to who they could and could not touch – elders could not touch women and sisters could not touch men, other than a hand shake. They had to adjust to the custom of hugging and kissing on the cheek rather than shaking hands. They had to fix their hair conservatively and wear conservative Sunday best clothes all the time. They were only allowed to drink boiled or bottled water, and that included the water they used to brush their teeth. They had weekly meetings with other missionaries where they had to report on the work they had done the previous week. They were not allowed to watch television nor listen to the radio. They had no idea what was happening in the world around them because they did not watch the news nor read the newspaper. After becoming adjusted to this dramatic

change of life style, it became as natural as breathing for all of them. After a while, they could not imagine how life could go on without all the rules.

The problems they all experience at the beginning are a normal phenomenon and a source of much laughter when they look back on the silly things they did at the start. Many are the stories of the unsuspecting Elder who was taught to say “No thank you, I’m pregnant” when he was full at lunch. Each mission is full of its own lore of similar stories, and a variety of others. But it is not the purpose of this project to collect those stories.

While the surprise of culture shock can be very big when arriving on a mission, the real surprise comes when they experience similar feelings upon returning home, a situation that has been called “re-entry shock.” Just as it was normal for the new missionary to feel out of place at the beginning of his mission, the missionary returning home has similar feelings. They have become so accustomed to life as a missionary and life in a different country, that they are unsure of how to act in what should be familiar surroundings. Because they have adjusted so well to living with all the mission rules, they experience problems when trying to adjust to life outside the mission boundaries.

For example, for almost a year of my mission we did not have a shower curtain in our bathroom because there was not any need for one; the bathroom was set up in a way that it was like a shower stall that happened to have a sink and toilet in it as well. When I moved to a new house and it became necessary to buy a shower curtain, I was unsure of how to shower with it. For the first 21 years of my life I had used a shower curtain, but somehow I felt uncomfortable not being able to see the rest of the bathroom

while I showered. I ended up compromising, only closing the curtain half way. And that was while I was still in Brazil, months away from coming back to the United States.

The stories of the returned missionary who put bunk beds in his room and invited a different friend to spend the night each night so he would not have to sleep alone, or those who would only dress in a white shirt and tie for weeks after they came home are many, and are just the tip of the iceberg. We laugh at the stories and say that we will never be that weird when we go home, but somehow it happens to all of us to one degree or another.

The purpose of this collection was to gather these stories of reverse culture shock from the sister missionaries who served in the Brazil Curitiba Mission under President David F. Paulsen between July of 1998 and July of 2001. As one of them, I can understand where they are coming from, and I can laugh at the things they have done since they came home, one because I understand why they do them, and two because I have done the same things.

After a year and a half of the only contact we have with a young man being a hand shake; hugging them, and even dating them can be a very strange experience. Three of the stories deal with these problems, (items 1, 2, 3). Kristi Horrocks said of her first experience dating after she got home that, "It was bad, it was so bad" (item 1). She also summed up how we all felt when she said, "I was pathetic" (item 9). It is a strange adjustment to living life outside the mission rules as illustrated by items 6, 7, and 8. Because we all faced similar problems coming home, we are all able to laugh at them together. And somehow we all made it through.

I know the elders who served in the same mission as we did probably have similar stories, but I wanted to talk specifically with the sisters. While we were all in the same area and doing basically the same things every day, the mission that an elder serves and that a sister serves are completely different. Our styles of adjusting to both the mission and then life after the mission are different. Just talking with the sisters provided a small enough group to get a good understanding of what we have all gone through. Further limiting my collection to just the American sisters who served in the Brazil Curitiba Mission rather than including those Brazilians who served along side us made it even more of a homogenous group.

The stories were tape recorded at a Sisters Luncheon held at the home of our mission president in Salt Lake City, Utah on February 23, 2002, and taken from conversations with the sisters at other informal gatherings. The stories have been edited slightly from their original telling – I have not included things that had no relevance to the story. After recording the stories, I organized them according to topic.

The stories show our struggle to define where we now fit in with our families and friends. They demonstrate the difficulty we have in the change in our standard of living upon returning home. Through collecting these stories, we were able to share our difficulties and provide psychological support for each other. It provided us with a place to share our feelings and experiences with others who understood where we had been and what we had been through. Stories of coming home would inevitably bring up stories of what we had been through in Brazil and opened a way to share those experiences with people who would appreciate them and understand them.

It would be necessary to expand this group to see if our experiences are similar to those of missionaries who served in other parts of the world. Studying the differences between the re-entry shock experienced by elders and sisters from the same mission would also provide a good base for comparison.

The stories collected here represent only a small percentage of all the stories I have heard. Unfortunately I did not always have a tape recorder handy when they would inevitably come up. But I had a lot of laughs getting the ones I did get.

Autobiographical Sketch

I was born in Salt Lake City, Utah and brought up in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. When I was nine my family moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. We moved again when I was thirteen, this time to El Paso, Texas. I consider myself to be from the Southwest United States when anybody asks me where I am from.

I am the oldest child in my family. My brother is two years younger than me and my sister is four years younger than me. Because we moved around some while we were growing up, we are pretty good friends, especially now that all of us are in college, even though we are all attending different schools.

I attend Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, where I am in the elementary education program and will graduate in April of 2002. I did my student teaching in Colonia Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico, at a private elementary school in the fall of 2001. My brother is a sophomore at Rice University in Houston, Texas, majoring in civil engineering and history. My sister is a sophomore at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, majoring in elementary education.

In order to serve a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the young men must be at least 19 years-old and the young women must be at least 21 years-old. In the summer of 1999 my brother turned 19, and I turned 21. On October 6, 1999, we both left to serve missions in Brazil, he in Ribeirão Preto and I in Curitiba. It was a wonderful experience to be able to share Brazil with my brother and it gave us one more thing in common. I especially enjoy it because it gives me someone to talk to

in Portuguese, something we like to do much to the dismay of our parents who cannot understand us.

I returned from Brazil on March 28, 2001, and still dream of going back some day. Serving a mission was the best thing I ever did with my life up to this point. It is something that affects my life daily in an untold number of ways. Being in Brazil helped me mature, discover who I am, and also changed who I am in so many ways. Some of the stories collected here are from my own experiences of trying to become a normal person again. I contributed items 3 “Don’t touch me,” 6 “Lettuce and tomato salad,” 7 “Watching TV,” and 11 “Crying on the couch.”

I know I can never go back to who I was before I went to Brazil. In fact, as I am sitting here putting together this collection I am wearing my Brazilian soccer shirt and my “havaianas,” the sandals I bought in Brazil and still wear around the house because I cannot go bare foot any more. I do not think any of us will ever truly be “normal” again.

List of Informants

Lynnece Barlow

Lynnece is from Payson, Utah and lives there currently with her family. She works in her dad's cabinet business taking care of the customers and getting bids on cabinets. She goes down to Mexico with her family every couple of months. She served in the Brazil Curitiba Mission from May 21, 1998, to December 15, 1999. She contributed item number 2, "Running into Pres."

Brenda Louise Daniels

Brenda is from Fremont, California, but her family is moving to Utah right now, and she is not too thrilled about that. There are ten children in her family, seven boys and three girls. She is number three with two older brothers. Her youngest brother was born while she was in Brazil. She did gymnastics for eight years which naturally led her into capoeira when she got back from Brazil because of the flips and things that are involved with it. She is a student at Brigham Young University where she recently decided she is going to study finance. After graduating she wants to get married and have a family. She served in the Brazil Curitiba Mission from December 8, 1999, to May 9, 2001. She contributed item number 8, "What did I wear."

Kristi LaDawn Horrocks

Kristi is from Midvale, Utah. She is a student at the University of Utah where she is studying math education and coaching and should graduate within two more years.

She was the head coach for the Junior Varsity girls basketball team at Alta High School in Utah and led them to a 20-0 season this last year. She was also the assistant coach for the girls Varsity basketball team. At the Sisters Conference in February, she admitted to being the oldest one in the group. She served in the Brazil Curitiba Mission from April 22, 1998, to October 13, 1999. She contributed items 1 “Less than 24 hours” and 9 “Writing in my journal.”

Emily Sue Jorgensen

Emily is from Taylorsville, Utah where she grew up her whole life. She served in the Brazil Curitiba Mission from May 3, 2000, to August 2001. She had to return earlier than the 18 months that young women serve because she broke her toe and it was never set right in Brazil. But her parents did go down to pick her up and she was able to travel a bit with them before coming back to the United States. She contributed item number 4, “Xerox.”

Elisabeth Liljenquist

Liz is from Idaho Falls, Idaho. Her family is very large, she being one of the youngest of 15 children, five of whom her parents adopted. She is a student at Brigham Young University studying English. Lately she has been thinking of going into law after she gets her bachelors degree. She served in the Brazil Curitiba Mission from March 8, 2000, to September 12, 2001. But she did not come straight home, instead she stayed for about a week with her family and showed her parents where she had been, visiting

the areas she served in and finally getting to see the water falls at Foz de Iguacu. She contributed item number 10, "Time at home."

Virginia Margaret Watson

If you ask Meg, she will tell you she is from Franklin, North Carolina, but her parents moved to Bear Lake, Utah, while she was serving a mission. She will graduate in August of 2002 from Brigham Young University with a degree in information systems. In April of 2002 she will be married in the Bountiful Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Meg (as everyone calls her), was thrilled when she found out she would be serving a mission in Brazil; she literally jumped for joy. She had had an older brother serve in Salvador, Brazil. She served in the Brazil Curitiba Mission from November 18, 1998, to May 17, 2000. She contributed item number 5, "Praying in English."

Item #1
First Dates
Less than 24 hours

The relationship between elders and sisters on the mission is one unlike any other male/female relationship in the world. We are good friends, but we have no idea what the other's first name is. We joke and play, but always with a religious undertone. We are more like brothers and sisters, and rarely picture each other outside the realms of a mission. That is why this first date story is so funny, because it is two people who knew each other as elder and sister for a year and a half, and suddenly she is faced with trying to see him in a different light. She has to deal with being in the United States, not being a missionary any more, and dating all on the same night, and it ends up being too much to tackle all at once.

The parts that are in italics are comments made by others in the group that kept the story going.

* * * * *

That was less than 24 hours after I got home. Okay, this elder from the mission called me and ...

- *Oh, I remember that.*

You remember that?

- *I was with [Sister] Villafan at the time.*

Oh, I was like, how do you know about that? You were on the mission.

- *Tell the true version.*

'K. And he called me right the next morning and asked if I wanted to hang out with his friends that night. So I was like sure. Cause I was supposed to go home with him but I extended, so he'd been home a month and I just got home and uh.

- *Who was it?*

No, I'm not telling you. And so, we went up into the mountains and his friends all went and did stuff and we started like getting all cuddly. And I was like "What are you doing?" I mean I'd been home less than 24 hours, I thought. And then like, we went and watched a movie after and he started holding my hand and all kind of stuff. And I was like "I don't even like you." But I didn't know what to do because I wasn't, I wasn't used to, I mean I wasn't, I hadn't tried to get out of something for a long time. So I didn't know what to do. So I just sat there and all, "Oh my gosh this is the worst night of my life." And then I didn't want to go on a date for about three months after that. I didn't even want to be next to a guy. I was like, but. Well that was bad. I mean less than 24 hours after you get home you haven't touched a guy for a year and a half and

then all of a sudden. Well it had been longer for me 'cause my boyfriend went on a mission before I did, so I hadn't really done anything for two years. So, little difficult to handle. And then he went to kiss me when we got home and I was like (laughs). And I just put my head down and I'm all, "Thanks. Gotta go, alright" (laughs). I was like, "Oh my gosh." And he'd only been home for a month. It wasn't like he had a lot of practice.

So I was just like, oh, whatever. But I think he got the hint when I just like put my head down because he came to my homecoming and then I didn't really talk to him after that.

- *Is he married now?*

Yeah, he's married now.

- *So what does it matter, tell us his last name.*

- *Come on.*

- *We are all dying.*

You all you older people know him.

- *I can't remember what it was though, I remember I heard the story, but I can't remember what it was.*

Everybody knows. Sister Paulsen did you tell everybody?

- *I didn't tell anybody.*

- *I can't think of his last name to save my life, I know who it was though.*

(laughter)

Um, yeah, it was uh, Elder Jenson.

- *That's funny.*

Yea, hilarious. No it was bad. It was so bad.

Lynnece Barlow
Salt Lake City, Utah
23 February 2002

Item #2
First Dates
Running into Pres.

Our mission president becomes our father while we are serving a mission. He guides us and helps us get through all the difficulties we face as missionaries. And he does it all in a white shirt and tie. Most missionaries never see the mission president out of a suit, so the first time that happens is always a strange experience. Also, because all of our experiences with him have been in a mission setting, seeing him outside of the mission is also strange, as is related in this story. Lynnece felt weird running into President Paulsen while she was on a date with a young man at Temple Square in Salt Lake City, Utah, because she had always been a missionary when she had seen him before, and missionaries do not date.

* * * * *

Yea, that was a blind date actually. I know. Afterwards, I just kind of had to laugh because I was like, oh I went to see my mission president and stuff and I'm with some guy that it was a blind date. So, nothing else became of it. We even walked in front of the reflection pool.

Self
Provo, Utah
6 April 2002

Item #3
The Opposite Sex
Don't touch me

Contact with males was restricted to just a hand shake while we were missionaries. They were not allowed to hug us or touch us in any other way. It becomes second nature after a little while and we do not even think about doing anything along those lines. I told this to one of my companions one night after she had been back for a year and a half and I had been back for a year while we were going out on the town together.

* * * * *

It was about a month or so after I came home and I got together with some of my friends from before the mission, and the guys were all married. And we made some dinner and then watched a video and were all just sitting around talking. My friend Jarren was sitting on the floor next to me and his wife, my friend Emilee, was sitting on the other side of him. She was about four or five months pregnant then. And I said something and Jarren hit me on my knee and I froze because a guy was touching me and they weren't supposed to do that. It took me a couple of seconds before I was able to calm down and remind myself that that was okay now, that guys could touch me. And he didn't mean anything by it, I mean, he was married and all. But it scared me because a guy hadn't touched me in so long.

Emily Sue Jorgensen
Salt Lake City, Utah
5 April 2002

Item #4
Language Problems
Xerox

At first we all struggle learning Portuguese, but after a while there are some ideas that we forget how to express in English. There are some words that just come more easily in Portuguese because that is how we say them more often than not. After going to a mission reunion in Salt Lake City, Utah, some of us went to Scone Cutters for a little bite to eat. While we were sitting there, we started talking about some of the things we still do now that we started doing on the mission. In Portuguese “xerox” is pronounced “sherox.”

I can't call them copies. Like, I have to call them “xerox,” and not even xerox, but “sherox.” Xerox just sounds weird to me, and copies, that is just not right.

Virginia Margaret Watson
Salt Lake City, Utah
23 February 2002

Item #5
Language Problems
Praying in English

From the very beginning we say all of our prayers in Portuguese. At the start, they are simple memorized prayers where we are thankful for the day and ask a blessing for our families. But eventually it becomes second nature for us. It gets to the point where hearing, or worse, saying, a prayer in English just sounds funny. Most of us continue to say our personal prayers in Portuguese when we get back, making it very difficult to switch over and say them in English when we have to pray for a group. Lines in italics were said by others in the group.

- *Praying in English was so hard. I still can't do it.*
Yeah, my mom was like, "English!" before we would eat. It was so hard. I couldn't think. It is so hard to do it in English. I'd do it in Portuguese my family was all "yeah, that's cool." I could not pray in English. My family was like, "Are you ready to pray in English?" No, I can't do it.

Item #6
Mission Rules
Lettuce and tomato salad

We had strict rules about what we could and could not eat on the mission. Everything had to be cooked or peeled. Because lettuce could not be cooked or peeled, it was completely off limits during the time we were serving as missionaries. Strawberries were also forbidden because of the difficulty in peeling them. Because of that reason I always bought strawberry jam, and still do. But for a year and a half I had not even looked at lettuce to eat it.

* * * * *

One of my first nights home my mom made a lettuce and tomato salad for dinner. I had asked, before coming home, that she have Tator Tots in the freezer because I really missed those while I was on the mission. So we were having Tator Tots and chicken nuggets and that salad for dinner. I was perfectly fine with the tator tots and the chicken, but I inwardly revolted at eating the salad because I hadn't eaten lettuce in so long because it wasn't allowed on the mission and because the tomatoes weren't peeled, which was the mission rule. I don't remember if I actually ate any of the salad or not that night. I know that if I did, it was only a little bit because I couldn't break the habit that I had had for so long on the mission of not eating lettuce. It was real weird for me to do that.

Item #7
Mission Rules
Watching TV

We are not allowed to watch the television as missionaries, and while all the members know this, they would not always turn off their televisions when we arrived. So I learned how to sit in a room with people where the television was on and not pay any attention to it. Watching television is a habit, you either have the habit of watching it, or you have the habit of not watching it. I was talking with a sister about the things we did when we came home when this story came up.

* * * * *

So when I came home I had this habit of sitting there and not watching it. And I knew that I could watch it now, but I couldn't break that habit. I'd want to be with my parents while they were watching it, so I'd get a book and sit there and read my book instead of watching. It took me a couple of weeks before I could go in and turn on the tv and just sit down and watch it.

Item #8
Mission Rules
What did I wear

Sister missionaries wear dresses all day, every day. It is a little strange at first, but after a while it becomes very natural. But because of luggage restrictions, we each only have a certain number of dresses, and after wearing the same clothes for a year and a half, you get sick of them. Also during that year and a half your tastes change, so even clothes you left at home do not seem all that great when you get back.

Capoeira is a form of martial arts practiced in Brazil. It was originally created by the slaves as a way for them to practice fighting because it is performed to music and almost looks like dancing. Because of the moves the people make, they have very loose fitting clothing designed especially to do capoeira in.

Lines in italics were said by others in the group.

- *What did you wear when you came home?*

What did I wear?

- *Yeah*

My capoeira outfit. Because I have the coolest capoeira pants. And then I, okay when I came home I didn't have any clothes. Seriously, I just, my jeans didn't fit me, they were too big. I just had, like, I had a couple t-shirts and my capoeira. I had, I had the clothes that I bought there and then a couple dresses that I left at home that I pulled out of a box. I pulled out, like I had a couple boxes of clothes, and I kept throwing them away like "Ew! Ew! Ew! Don't like anything." So basically, I had my capoeira clothes from the mission that I would wear.

Kristi LaDawn Horrocks
Salt Lake City, Utah
23 February 2002

Item #9
Adaption Techniques
Journal Writing

Journal writing is greatly encouraged on the mission as a way to not only record important events, but also to get our feelings out and on paper so that we can deal with them better. Kristi did just that when she came home from her mission, recording how she felt upon returning to the United States and leaving Brazil behind.

* * * * *

Um, it wasn't really hard for me to adapt. I don't know. I came home and everybody said that I was exactly the same. But I read back in my journal and I think I missed it more than I thought I did. Because I, I wrote about it a lot, how much I wanted to see the people that I had worked with, and I wanted to just go back. So, I thought I was fine, but as I read it I thought, oh man, I was pathetic.

Item #10
Adaption Techniques
Spending time at home

The question "Are you normal yet?" is the same as "How have you adapted?" None of us believe we have truly adapted yet. After being on the go constantly for eighteen months, suddenly stopping and doing nothing at the end is quite a shock and we all feel like we should be doing something or going somewhere. That sudden stop makes us evaluate where we are going to go next, and we cannot wait to get going again. Lines in italics were said by others in the group.

* * * * *

- *How have you adapted?*

I haven't adapted yet. No, um. Well, I think for me, adapting was the whole three and a half months at home. Like, wanting to get back in school. So I was like, so I don't know. That really helped me like want to jump back into life because yeah, things are pretty slow at home.

Item #11
Adjustment Techniques
Crying on the couch

I told this to Sister Edwards, one of the sisters that I trained, the first time I saw her after she got back. She had been back for just over a month and I had been back barely a year. We were sitting in her living room looking through her pictures and talking about all the places we had been and how much we missed it all.

The feelings of homesickness I had while I was in Brazil were nothing compared to the feelings I had the night I talk about in this story. Part of that is because I knew I would be going home to my parents, but I have no idea when I will ever be able to see Brazil again. When I left Brazil, I learned what the true meaning of the word “good-bye” is. In fact, I refused to say it to people, but rather said “até,” which means “until.”

* * * * *

I was looking through my pictures back in June, I think it was, so I'd been home for a while already. But I was looking through them trying to find a picture I'd taken in one of the cemeteries so I could show my anthropology class what they looked like. And as I was going through them I was just hit with a huge wave of “saudades” (homesickness) for the mission and Brazil. It was night time and all my roommates were already in bed or getting there, so I just went out on the couch in our living room and left the lights out and just sat there and cried in the dark for about half an hour, missing it all so bad.