

Discovering my Azorean Roots / Descobrindo as minhas raízes açorianas
- Stephanie Amaral

Discovering my Azorean roots has been a lifelong journey of learning for me. From my father's admiration of his island's beauty to the rich smells of food that come from my vovo's little red bungalow, this tiny archipelago has always held a place in my heart.

After all, it was my Azorean grandmother who most taught me the values of family and faith. Always with a smile, delicious soups, stews and *biscoitos* to offer, the first to tap her feet to a Portuguese song and the one I always follow to summertime *festas*, it was my desire to talk to her that motivated me to pick up a book one day in the summer of 2010 to learn Portuguese and eventually pursue a Portuguese minor in university.

I had always wanted to travel to Portugal, especially the Azores. This lifetime opportunity was granted to me in 2012 when my professor invited me to study Portuguese at the Universidade dos Açores. Without hesitation, I packed my suitcase that summer and hopped on a direct flight to Ponta Delgada. This was my first time flying outside of Canada alone. I felt ecstatic and grown up but also nervous to start this adventure.

As I stepped off the plane, I immediately took in the fresh salty ocean air. A map, the ocean and my phone's camera became my new best friends. I filmed and took pictures of everything. Although the university campus was itself beautiful and though I did learn a lot with respect to the language, my real learning took place outside of the classroom.

I was fortunate to have my father join me for ten days during my stay in Ponta Delgada. I met my fourth-cousin Fatima who quickly became our personal tour guide. It was thanks to her kindness that we were able to explore many parts of the island. She drove us up and down the island's cobble-stoned narrow roads from the volcanic *caldeiras* in Furnas to the gorgeous *lagos* and breathtaking region of Nordeste.

I understood quickly why they called São Miguel *a ilha verde* for its green pastures and rolling hills. The villages reminded me of the *presépio* my vovo decorates every Christmas. Partaking in *as Festas do Divino Espírito Santo* further enriched my cultural experience. It was clear that Fatima adored her island and having my dad there with his eternal *açorianidade* only added to my never-ending excitement.

Amidst the walks I took with my father through the beautiful parks where he spent his childhood and the *freguesia* of Feteiras where he showed me his old home, school and church, I was finally discovering my Azorean roots. Meanwhile, our attempts to navigate the city on the mini bus, our mutual appreciation of the *maracuja-morango* flavoured ice cream we ate on the boardwalk and the *salada de polvo* at *Casa Marisca* became new memories we forged together as we visited this land of our ancestral past.

I spent my last few days with Fatima in her cozy pink home in Feteiras, waking up each morning to the same sounds, smells and sights that my family once upon a time woke up to. This peaceful finish to my trip only made it harder to fight back the tears as I said goodbye to the magical world that I had fallen in love with in only a few short weeks. I reluctantly boarded the plane, feeling both the bittersweet sadness of leaving and the enlightenment of discovering a new part of myself. I vowed to return again someday.

Having recently completed my undergrad with one of my final courses being on the

Azores, my trip only increased my appreciation for the literature I studied, including the works of Dias de Melo and Álamo Oliveira. Learning about the resilience of the Azorean people and what they have overcome has given me a deeper respect for my own family. Needless to say, my journey of learning doesn't end here – it is only beginning!