

Persistence

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## WARRIOR

Hold me back from temptation  
for sometimes I know not my strength.

Keep me safe within reason  
for at times I'm not aware of what might be at stake.

Hold me back when I am fearless  
for sometimes my limits are not within reasonable bounds.

Keep my eyes held open  
for I do not always see everything within plain sight.

Hold me back when desperation grips me tight by my chest  
for at times I do not see that it is a test.

Keep me honest  
for I am tempted to lie for I keep most secrets from myself.

Hold me back from the emptiness I constantly creep into  
for I do not see the darkness capture me.

Keep me strong and bold  
for at times I do not know what more I must face.

This is a letter to me – a promise to stay strong-minded and strong-willed. Failure is not in me, for I am a warrior, although I have not killed. I am a warrior and am in a constant battle with life. I will always be a survivor through guilt, pain, failure, love, loss, and envy. I will overcome anything that just might be thrown at me. I will keep myself strong, and I will hold myself back when the fight is not worth fighting for. I am a warrior and surviving is what I do.

*~Tonya Clark*

### ONE SPECIAL DAY

I miss the busy days when I worked in a hospital in Nicaragua, even though back then I always had too much stress in my life. I especially remember one night shift while I was doing my social service in the hospital. On that night I helped sixteen babies be born. That night was very busy! I was the only doctor available to assist all the women in the hospital who were in childbirth. The other doctor was in ICU caring for a very sick baby.

I was worried about the babies getting mixed up, so I repeated several times to the nurses, "Don't forget to write the mother's name on the babies' bracelets immediately after I give the newborn babies to you!" I kept running around, trying to help all the pregnant women, some of whom were screaming in pain. Some women were in beds that were too small for them. Some women were even waiting in the hallway outside of the three labor rooms because those rooms were already full.

I always worked hard at my job, but this night was amazing because of all the work I had to do. I helped dilate the mothers-to-be, removed placentas, aspirated babies' noses and mouths, cut umbilical cords, and sutured some of the mothers. Meanwhile, the nurses put drops in the babies' eyes so they wouldn't become infected. The majority of the babies born that night were girls. All of the babies were born healthy – thanks be to God! All of the mothers were happy with their new children and thanked me for my help as they left the delivery room.

The next day, in our morning meeting, the head doctor told us how scared he was when he heard what had happened. He asked, "Who was the poor doctor who worked so hard last night?"

I answered, "Me!" He was so surprised that I was the only doctor to deliver sixteen babies! I had started working at 6:00 P.M. and finished at 8:00 A.M. the next day. I hadn't had a second to close my eyes! I felt happy, though. Losing sleep didn't matter to me; the important thing was that I was able to deliver so many healthy babies in one work shift!

*~Tania Montalban*

## LONELY MAN

I am a lonely man,  
put upon this earth  
to raise a good family  
and see what I'm worth.

I couldn't read or write,  
and I just struggled through the night.  
I sat here and pondered about my wasted time,  
and finally – I made up my mind,

To make my life better  
and to learn more skills,  
to be a better person,  
and, in turn, it gives me chills.

My tutor, Mrs. Schmits, has encouraged and taught me  
about education and self-worth.  
I've learned to breathe and see a new hope,  
and I feel like a baby experiencing birth.

*~Ronald W. Fugate*

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## WHAT IT FEELS LIKE FOR A BRAZILIAN GIRL TO BE AN AU PAIR IN THE UNITED STATES

This title is a little big, I know. But that's exactly what this story is about. I know it looks silly. But keep reading until the end. I promise you'll not regret it, even if you don't know what an "au pair" is. Let's call our "au pair" character Bruna, not only because most of the Brazilian au pairs I know are named Bruna, but also because it's a nice name.

Before leaving to go the USA, Bruna first packs all her favorite stuff like her sunglasses imported from Paraguay, her summer clothes – that she won't really wear in the United States, for some reasons that you, reader, will find out later – and finally her winter boots – which she won't wear either, because her feet would freeze in the first snow due to the thin leather, or she would slip due to the high heels. After that, when her parents are already thinking the baggage is going to overflow, she packs all she knows she can't live without, like her Always pads – because she doesn't know yet whether there are Always pads in the United States or not – and a big Brazilian chocolate box that she claims to be the best in the world. And I don't think she's wrong. You should try it.

In the airplane, Bruna feels cold for a long time because she forgot how to say "blanket." It's not because her English is still terrible but because she is so excited that if someone asked her name speaking in English she would think twice before answering. But then she finds out the flight attendants speak Spanish, and because she speaks Portuguese, she thinks she can speak Spanish too. She struggles with some words until she says "una manta" and tells the other au pair seated beside her that, outside the plane is much colder than

inside. Later the other au pair remembers how to say “blanket” and tells the flight attendant they need some more.

When Bruna gets to New York, she spends three days at the Holiday Inn, but she doesn't really rest from the trip. She needs to attend the Au Pair Training – which feels like a 24-hour-a-day training because she has only three days to learn how to take care of an American child, how an American child thinks, behaves, expresses him/herself, plays... and throws feet. This is so that she can be a professional au pair, with a Red Cross certificate and everything else.

The happiest moment at the hotel is when she finally gets through to talk to her mother, not because her mother wasn't home earlier – actually, her mother was holding the telephone wondering whether it would ring or not during all this time – but because the phone card she bought from the agency just didn't want to work. Then, when she calls her boyfriend, she doesn't tell him she just realized the card was perfect, but she didn't know how to use it.

Then Bruna flies to the town where her host family lives, thinking not about the other au pairs she met at the hotel from all over the world, not about her mother, not about her father, not about her boyfriend. But, it goes more or less like: “Will I be able to remember everything I heard at the training? Will I survive after all they told me about American kids? Will I be a fatso from eating too much junk food? Will I like the kids? Will the kids like me? Will they respect me?” Then, 45 minutes before the arrival she starts thinking “Will it be possible to find my host family at the airport considering I'm so sleepy and tired that I can't even see? Will the kids be with my host parents waiting for me? Will the kids smile at me? Will I be nervous? Will we understand each other? Will I be able to speak English? What time can I go to sleep?” Then the flight attendant asks if she's all right, because she is sweating, and it isn't even hot.



The first three months are really hard. Bruna feels like she left the whole world behind along with all that really matters and wonders when this American dream will be over so that she can meet her family and friends again, and her dog and boyfriend. She needs to hug them all, to eat her mother's rice and beans with Brazilian steak and Brazilian salad, which she believes to be the best in the world... What? Just try it. Bruna cries every night and tries to like everything around her. She tries to like the food, the kids, her host parents, and her new bedroom. And she knows this is supposed to be her family, but everything seems unfamiliar.

About 100 days after living in the United States as an au pair, she starts introducing herself like "Hi, my name is Bruna, I'm from Brazil," and instead of saying her age, she says, "and I take care of three children." But sooner than Bruna expects, she meets other au pairs, and, believe it or not, there are about 80 of them. And that's when everything changes! From all 80 she makes friends with 2 who think like her and do things just like her. And she starts driving every weekend to their houses, and they sleep each weekend in one another's house, because she never thinks they live too far, even if one of these friends lives an hour away.

Soon Bruna finds out that she is not the only one who can't stand Dora, Thomas, and Wiggles anymore; who can't stand her host kids crying because they don't want to do their homework; and, finally, who can't understand how her host kids can eat mac and cheese everyday if she can't even smell it after she pours the cheese. Her au pair friends feel exactly the same, and there are many more amazing things to share! They tell Bruna that people have asked them the same stupid questions they did to her like "Do you have cars in your country? Do you have cell phones? Do you have Internet? Do you eat only rice and beans? Where is your country? Do you guys speak Spanish or what? Why do you wear gloves inside the house? Are you serious you haven't

seen snow yet? Do you play soccer?" She also finds out she's not the only one who says "Now I know how hard it was for my parents to take care of my brother and me."

When she's driving somewhere with her friends, they turn on the radio; otherwise she'll start singing kids' songs inside the car. Then they stop at the McDonald's drive thru and each of them asks for a double cheeseburger and a big coke from the dollar menu, and they comment they are getting fat. They drive Bruna to the nearest Victoria's Secret, Gap, and Calvin Klein stores, and her life will never be the same again. Bruna gets really happy that, with her own money, she can buy Victoria's Secret, even though she spends most of it at Target. In summer she buys about a hundred nice t-shirts and fifty shorts for \$1.00 each, which she found on sale at Aeropostale, Charlotte, and Target. She says she'll never buy clothes in Brazil again because it's much cheaper in the United States, so she sends it all on a ship to Brazil, because it won't fit in the baggage.

I'm saying all this because it's true, for many girls. But it doesn't really matter which country you come from. You will always be unique. In reality, I don't even buy Victoria's Secret, and I use the lotion from Meijer. My friends laugh at me, but I don't mind! Every girl is different and unique. And being an au pair is much more than all this. This is just the funny part that everybody tells. And every girl has a unique life experience as an au pair in the United States, even if we generalize when we are exchanging experiences.

Some girls say they definitely needed to be an au pair to find out they really don't want to have children. Other girls find out it's not as hard as everybody says, and they now decided they do want to have children, and, believe me, no one is as ready to have kids as an au pair!

After the third month you start feeling like this is home, because you have finally gathered pieces enough to make it look like home. And later, you even find out that anywhere in the world can be home when you have friends and people around who love you. I wonder if one day I will be able to leave the kids I take care of. They became my kids. I wake them up, I help them get ready for school, I help them with their homework, I pack their lunchbox for school, I make their food, I comb their hair, I want them to look good at school, I want them to feel good and healthy, I laugh with them, I feel their pain when they are sick or sad, I teach them the way I think they should live life, see people, love others and be happy. Their mother doesn't live here. Their father is home only at night so they are really mine during the day, and nothing can change it.

When you leave the United States for your home country, well... I can't tell you because I haven't left yet. I'm just wondering if I can, if I should leave one day; if I should leave these kids; if I should leave my friends from here, my church, my teachers, my school, my bedroom, and everything else that makes my world real today.

Finally, I want to answer those curiosities about Brazil that I was just kidding about being stupid. It's completely normal to ask questions about a country you don't know yet. We are usually ignorant when dealing with people from other countries, but there are no stupid questions at all. I could have asked my host family if there were Always pads at the supermarket before coming. Yes, we do have cars, and Brazil is among the five biggest producers of vehicles in the world. It has 135,000,000 cell phone users – with 190,000,000 inhabitants. We are also among the top five countries in the world in Internet use. Our country shares frontiers with all of the countries in South America, except Chile and Ecuador, and it is the only one in South America where people don't speak Spanish. We speak Portuguese,

because Brazil was discovered by Pedro Alvarez Cabral, who was from Portugal, while the other countries were conquered by Spanish colonizers. We do have snow in Brazil, but only in Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, two southern states. Soccer is as popular in Brazil as football is in the United States, but it doesn't mean that all Brazilian au pairs play soccer.

I'd like to thank, in the name of all au pairs of the world, all host families and all you Americans who know this is a wonderful country to live in, with wonderful people, with wonderful seasons, with wonderful places, including the shopping malls. You welcome people from other countries to share everything with you, so they can experience the American dream. I can tell you, I'll never forget any piece of it.

*~Ellen C. Valvassori*

## HIGH SCHOOL DROP OUT

I never intended to drop out of school,  
But life will throw you curves.

Pregnant at a very young age,  
I seemed to break all the rules.

I thought for sure that I'd go back,  
Finish like all the rest.

But raising a little one at home  
Put me to the test.

I had to work to help pay the bills.  
We had a mouth to feed.

It made going back to graduate  
Harder each day it would seem.

I've been out of school since '86.  
I never did go back.

I made a life of motherhood  
And a wife too, I might add.

Now here I am; now 41  
I'm seeking still to find.

A satisfaction I've longed for so,  
An education left behind.

The only advice that I can give  
To other drop outs just like me:

It's never too late to educate –  
I'm getting my G.E.D.!

*~Sherry Walter*

### A VERY PROUD MOMENT IN MY LIFE

In February 2006, I lost my job at a shop that made automotive parts. I was sent to the unemployment office to see if they could help me with my education, so I could get a job besides working in a factory or being a laborer. I was given a test at the unemployment office and was told that my education skills were not up to par for any other type of work. I also had physical issues that prevented me from doing the work I had previously done. I went to different programs such as the Veterans Administration and state programs that told me I should seek special help.

I started out with the L.E.A.F. (Literacy Education for Adults and Families) Program where I took a test to show them what my reading, writing and math levels were. The L.E.A.F. Program sent me to the Miami Valley Literacy Council to help me with the basic skills I needed for future everyday functions. My feelings towards attending this school were very doubtful because other programs had not really helped me. I was wrong, and the instructors and/or teachers at the school were very helpful and encouraging as my test scores improved. The instructors and/or teachers, Mary, Michelle and Maria, always got excited when I improved in the tests. I really did not understand why they were getting excited by my improvement. In the past others had just kind of shrugged it off when I had done something good.

I finally realized why they were getting excited when I was at a store one day and picked up a CD and was able to read all the songs on it. It was then that I realized how well I was doing with their encouragement and help. By writing about this experience in my life and how well I have been doing, I will be able to inspire others to constantly keep striving and working towards a goal of improving themselves

in whatever they do and to realize that age does not mean anything.

*~Robert Todd*



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## I WILL SURVIVE

I was told I was an accident  
Parents divorced  
Lived with my mom and then my dad  
Beaten with a belt buckle and a 2 x 4

### **I will survive**

In and out of many different schools  
Couldn't keep up  
Put in a Special Ed class  
Pushed through the system until 11<sup>th</sup> grade

### **I will survive**

On my own at 16  
Earned \$21.00 a week  
Groomed and trained horses

### **I will survive**

Made many mistakes  
Smoked pot  
Drank and then drank some more  
Couldn't stop  
Broken jaws, broken hip, plates in my face,  
pins in my arm  
Next stop prison  
Mind game  
Disease, homemade knives  
Couldn't sleep, violence  
Fought back in self defense  
Stabbed in the arm while defending self  
Lifers were there

**I will survive**

Did my time and learned many lessons  
Out of prison  
No more pot  
No more alcohol  
Been dry for five years  
Going to ABLE  
Trying to find a job  
I am not an accident. I have purpose!

**I will survive!**

*~Rickie Weise*

## WHEN I WAS YOUNG

When I was young, I wanted to have a job. As I got older and reached the fifth grade, my teacher told me to read a book. I realized that I could not read at all. The only words I could read were “the,” “and,” “me,” “to,” “right,” “went,” “go,” and some names. I saw my chance to have a job just drop out of my life.

That day, I went home and cried my little heart out. That is when I asked my mother, “What is wrong with me? Why can’t I read like the other kids in my class?”

My mother said, “Ask your teacher to help you.” So the next day, I asked my teacher if she could help me with my reading. I was full of hope. She said, “I can’t stop teaching my class for one person just to help them.” There went my dream out the window again. Then she said, “You need to ask your mother, brother and sister for help.”

When I went home and talked to my mother, she said, “Baby, I work too hard to put food and clothes on my children’s backs. Ask your brother and sister to help you, and if they don’t help you, let me know.” I did ask them, but they did not help. They had things to do for themselves. I gave up and I did not care about reading any more—and I never told my mother.

The next thing I knew, my teachers were passing me along like I was water. It really hurt me, but I did my best not to show it. I did a good job playing it off. When I was in the eighth grade, one of my teachers said she was not going to pass me. That made me happy, because I thought that I would have a chance to do it all over again and it could help me to learn just a little more. I think the other teachers must have

talked to her about passing me along again, because she ended up passing me anyway. I really hoped someone would see the hurt in my eyes and help me, but no one ever saw it.

High school was coming and I did not feel good about it. "But I will be with my friends," I kept saying to myself. It was summer break, and I put eighth grade behind me and played with my friends. However, when it was time to go back to school, boy I hated it. I thought, "Everyone will know I can't read, and it is going to be so hard for me." All I could think about was that my teachers were going to pass me like water again and I would never learn anything. I had to go to school, but I did everything I could to stay out of class. Do not get me wrong, I went to gym and cooking classes, but nothing else. One day, I was walking in the hallway and ran into some friends. Someone asked me, "Do you want to go to the other school to see what is going on?" I went with them and I am not going to lie, I had fun. However, when school was out for the summer, my mother got a letter in the mail saying that I had to go to summer school in order to be in the tenth grade. I went for a month and a half, but then I started playing with my friends and skipping class again.

We were downtown one day and I saw a building with a sign on the door that said "JOIN JOB CORPS." The next day, I ran down there and signed up. After that, I went home and felt so good about myself. I ran in the door. "Mom! Mom!" I cried, "Guess what? I signed up for Job Corps! I can get a job to help out with your bills!" She was so happy for me. "When are you going? What city are you going to?" she asked. All I could say was that I did not know yet. We waited for two weeks. When my letter from Job Corps came, it said that I would leave in three days to Cleveland, Ohio.

Everything was fine until the reading problem came up again. In Job Corps, you have to go to every class. I could not read in class, so I stopped going. I managed to stay eight

months. Then, the lady who was in charge came to my room and asked me why I had not been to classes. I just looked at her without saying a word. That is when she told me I had to go home. I thought, "Boy, my life is so over. I need to dig a hole in the ground and stay there until I die."

Years later, I found out about the Miami Valley Literacy Council. I signed up for classes there and you know what? I found out that I am not the only one that has trouble reading. Man, I feel good. Now I am a whole new person. Thank you, Literacy Council. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

*~Realdia Wilson*

