

**Salem State University
School of Graduate Studies
Department of English**

A Thesis in English Writing

By

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The Wonders of Incontinence

A memoir

Luiz Madrid

To my father



It is impossible to miss Lake *Santa Mônica* when driving along the *Imigrantes* roadway toward the *São Paulo* shorelines. Every time I cross this lake, I remember the day I went fishing with my father when I was about six years old. I poked my fingers while trying to fit a worm on the hook or while unhooking the fish before it swallowed the entire bait. If you were a good fisherman, you could catch multiple fish with just half of it. I caught two or more fish with one worm, but my father caught more than double that. We took home a dozen or more good-sized fish. By the end of the day, I smelled like fish guts, and everything reeked of fish. I was looking for relief and was happy it was time to go. We had to cross the lake by boat before reaching the car to return.

On our way back, I had nothing to do inside the boat. I purposely rested my fishing line in the water with a hook but no bait. I was tired and relaxed, contemplating the designs my fishing line created in the water as the canoe dragged us through the winding channels. Suddenly, there was a fish on my hook. I pulled it from the water. It was a small *lambari*, a brightly colored South American characin fish often found in tropical waters. It was too small to keep, but the excitement made me happy.

I became famous as the boy who caught a fish without bait. That day closed with a golden key; it was glorious. My father and his fisherman friends retold this story many times during other trips, and I felt proud.



The joy of fishing was short-lived. I must explain a personal problem that complicated these trips: I experienced long-term night incontinence. I had episodes of incontinence everywhere, almost every night. Unfortunately, there was no remedy.

Those fishing trips always began early in the morning, and we needed to stay overnight in someone's house. One of them was my cousin Zé's. He was married to my oldest cousin, Mariazinha. He had a white VW Kombi bus that easily fit ten people. Zé was the designated driver. My cousins and their daughters never made a big deal about my incontinence. I spent numerous nights at their house. Peeing in somebody else's bed was humiliating, but honestly, I don't believe I have any psychological scars from that time.

No matter what I did, I always remembered waking up to the heat of soggy sheets and pajamas. I destroyed beds, sofa beds, carpets, and a sofa chair; there were no exceptions. My incontinence was a free thing, manifesting itself regardless of whose house or bed I was sleeping in. I had no control over it; I was the master of incontinence.

Luckily, I did not have to wear diapers, but people would put layers and layers of plastic sheets underneath the bedding. At home, my mom would keep different

sets. I always had fresh, clean sheets. There was nothing better than peeing in your bed!

I was always ordered to go to the bathroom before bed and prohibited from having drinks before bedtime, especially *Tubaina*, an old Brazilian carbonated cola. This sweet soda, which tasted like a mix of guarana and sugar, was my favorite. Everyone thought *Tubaina* was the leading cause of my soaking nightmares.

Everyone was understanding about my incontinence problem. I do not remember any harsh punishment except when sleeping at my grandparents' home. Grandma Palmira had a whip behind her door, and she always promised to use it if I could not control my urge to pee. Grandma's house was very dark at night, and she conveniently kept a giant *penico*, a white metal chamber pot, underneath the bed. It had a colossal handle and looked like a big, tea-ceramic cup without a saucer.

In the morning, breakfast was served with sermons. My grandma would say, "You are already a big kid, Luiz; you must stop peeing in bed!" She never used her whip, but when she spoke to you, she looked deep into your eyes as if she were addressing your soul. I felt embarrassed and guilty, but quickly forgot everything when I got home. I remember the delicious big yucca cookies she baked and served with black coffee and milk.



The fishermen's group consisted of about eight to ten friends. I could join them whenever my father was present. Initially, I wondered if my father and the other fishermen caught all the fish they used to bring back home, so one day, I decided to ask. They said that when there were no fish, they would buy some from the local markets to avoid returning home with empty Styrofoam coolers.

When the day was cold and gray, and the fish weren't biting, they sipped spirits. I had to promise to keep both things a fisherman's secret, which everyone already knew. I remember packing and carrying the liquor bottles carefully, but I didn't try to drink them until later years. *Cachaça*, a popular distilled spirit made from fermented sugar cane juice, smells like pure alcohol, similar to a product my sisters used to clean glass windows. I could taste a tiny sample, but my preferences leaned toward the homemade cherry, blackberry sweet liquors, or *caipirinhas*, a mix of *cacheça*, sugar, and lemon.

I remember one of the fishing trips, my father went for a nap. He was snoring, and his big belly was rising and falling. Someone stole a cigarette from his pocket and placed it, unlit, on his lips. Then, they took pictures. My father had no idea what was happening. They were a group of clowns who talked about

women and repeatedly retold their fishing stories. I could only understand them partially, but I enjoyed listening. They were happy men, having fun with each other.



Then, there was my Aunt Luiza Ruiz. She was very concerned and jealous of everything. Her furniture looked like it was covered in plastic, and she would not let anyone touch her decorations or flower arrangements. Her house was always sparkling clean and smelled good, and she was the best baker I knew. I remember the flavors of the crispy sweetness of the lemon pies she used to bake; it is still one of my favorite desserts.

My uncles lived with us temporarily in a bedroom and the front woodshed, which they turned into a kitchen. My father was very generous and happy to host them until they finished building their big two-floor house on the land next to my father's. Aunt Luiza and my Uncle Pedro had a color TV set. I was allowed to watch it for a while, but I was never allowed to sleep over at her house.

My family only had a TV later. I remember the day my father bought our first TV. It was an old, black-and-white box, heavy as a safe. After it was installed, I watched cartoons for the entire day. I loved *Woody Woodpecker*. I loved comedies like *Lucille Ball* and *Get Smart*, with *Agent 86*, a great mix of James Bond and Mel Brooks comedy. To this day, I still love the same stuff.

One late night, I fell asleep with the TV on. In the middle of the night, the old television got so hot that it burned, and we had to evacuate the house

because of the smell of burnt old bulbs. My father got furious. It took us a while to get a replacement TV, and without any doubt, I was the one to blame. Things like TV were a luxury for my family. I never understood why we could not afford many things compared to my friends from school.

Uncle Pedro, my father's brother, was one of the fishermen. My Aunt Luiza did not like Uncle Pedro spending too much time with my father because she believed my father was not a good example for his brother, who, like all my father's brothers and sisters, had compulsive drinking problems.

She always had a critical and negative opinion of my father. She always discouraged me from drinking like my dad. She meant well. She wanted to protect Uncle Pedro, too.



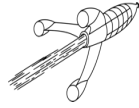
My father was known for many things, including his abilities as a master weaver. He was an artist. Everyone called him by his last name, *Madrid*, instead of João. I remember the heavy toolbox and cloth bags he took on his fishing trips. Inside the bags were interesting tools you would not expect to find: a small, crooked, and sharp knife, rolls of nylon and cotton strings, and big bamboo needles carved by himself. His magic fingers weaved the fishing nets. Pliers, scissors, small plastic containers with tiny hardware, and a heavy collection of egg-shaped lead sinkers. There were big and small hooks for every freshwater and saltwater fish. No one could ever blame the fishing equipment for a bad fishing day. That lie would not swim.

My father was an artist and an eloquent orator. He would recite other people's love poems as if they were written with his heart. He was charismatic and a great storyteller, and everyone enjoyed listening to him discuss his adventures.

No one could ever blame the fishing equipment for a bad fishing day. That lie would not swim. How often have I gotten my fishing lines stuck in the

rocks at the bottom of Lake Santa Monica? That was never a problem for my father. He would fix my fishing rod and say, “Try over there, “ pointing his artful hands to a new spot in the lake.

He spent weeks carving pieces of wood that eventually became little sculptures. I still have two of his sculptures with me. One shows a naked indigenous woman holding her big breasts in her hands, while the other shows a soldier in a stiff uniform wearing a helmet.



My father always had a curious mind. One day, I asked my father what those straight lines in the sky were. He said they were “missiles.” His response was serious, and his words seemed utterly valid.

At first, it made sense in my mind after watching too many superhero stories. However, after a couple of times, I started reflecting on it and would ask my father:

“Who is being attacked?” My father would not have an answer.

“Are we in war?”

My father would say, “No.”

After a while, I thought this missile thing was a reality in his mind. No one would convince him that he had the wrong information. I felt he wanted to believe they were missiles; maybe he heard that story from somebody he trusted.

Later, I had the opportunity to explain that the contrails formed in the sky came from passenger airplane engines. It was a matter of contact with the condensed cold air temperature and the hot engines. He seemed to have understood what I was saying, but I could see his eyes visualizing “missiles.”

Sometimes, I did not challenge my father. He had suffered too much in his life.



My parents had me and my nine siblings. Ruth, the first sister whom I never met, died of pneumonia when she was still a baby. The last one, Claudia, died before she was five; she had many heart surgeries and did not survive. The other five siblings and I, from oldest to youngest, are Angela, Luiz, Arlete, Mario, Pedro, and Antonio. I am the oldest of the boys.

We all lived together, including my parents, in a house built by my father. The house had a large bedroom, one living room, a kitchen, and a front woodshed where my father stored his tools. It was a small house, but it was warm in the winter, cool in the summer, and comfortable almost year-round. The house seemed to have central heat and air conditioning.

At one point in his life, I remember my father installing a bed in the front woodshed and sleeping alone, separated from my mother. Tool and fishing gear storage; my childhood private space, my uncle Pedro and Aunt Luiza Ruiza's temporary kitchen, and my father's sleeping place when he felt embarrassed for being drunk.

The bathroom was separate from the house, so skipping a shower during cold days was easy. I slept on one of the couches in the living room. The other siblings lived in the only bedroom, which had bunk beds, and slept in the living room; we had three couches, and the little ones slept in a crib. My parents slept in a double bed in the same bedroom.

I remember that in one of the top corners of the living room, there was a small wooden chapel with a yellow-orange light that stayed on all the time. The little church had a glass door that would open. Inside, a small statue of Our Lady of the Apparition, old family pictures, antique coins, and a dried mini flower bouquet. I never forgot the image of that chapel, mainly because you could see it lit up at night. When we were kids, my father used to point to the little chapel and say: Don't do this or don't do that -- it is a sin, and Our Lady of the Apparition is watching what you are doing.

I used to be afraid and always felt I was under surveillance. I would avoid doing wrong things under those Catholic eyes. My father taught us the "Hail Mary" when we were young, but we did not regularly attend church except during weddings and funerals. Angela, the oldest, was the only one who was very Catholic, and she still kneels beside her bed every night to pray.

Sleeping in the living room was challenging. My parents and younger siblings would wake up early, and if it was a Saturday, Angela was obligated to clean the whole house, so I could never get enough sleep. It was difficult because I was always tired and didn't have to go to work on weekends, but there was no choice. Saturday was designated

for house cleaning and laundry. I have learned how important it is to get enough sleep to be more productive the next day. I couldn't wait to get a place where I could enjoy sleeping.

Naturally, with so many in such a small space, my siblings and I always felt we did not have a private place to keep our things. It was very common that things you owned were never in their place. Without my consent, my brothers would wear my clothes or anything that belonged to me, even the ones purchased with my money. I also did the same.

I enjoyed painting, so I bought unpainted canvases and art supplies one day. One time, I sketched a drawing but did not have time to finish it. When I returned from school, one of my young brothers had painted it.

On another occasion, I had a small drawer in my parents' wardrobe to put small items, like sports cards, personal fake jewelry, pictures, and other items. I had recently done a photo shoot near a small pond where a friend from the theater and his family owned a small farm. The place was in the middle of the mountains, isolated from the city, and we had the entire place only for the two of us. I was around 17, and we decided to take naked pictures. My mother had heard I had made this trip, and since she loved the country, she had the idea of showing these pictures to my grandmother, Palmira, while she visited us. I wasn't home. My mother went into my drawer, grabbed the whole photo stack, and gave it to my grandma to see first. Oh boy, when Grandma Palmira saw my naked pictures, she went out of her mind ~ what was this, she inquired. Later, I told my mother she

should have asked my permission first; I would never show my naked front and back pictures to my mother or grandmother. I had to hide it in a safe place.

I used to get mad at everyone who used my stuff without permission. When there was arguing among siblings, my father would call those involved and often forced us to shake hands as a formal apology and promise not to do it again. We had to repeat, loud and clear, “Sorry for what I have done.” Then, we had to shake hands and say, “Apologies accepted; we are brothers and still friends.”

Well, my father did not make my mother do his apology ceremony when she went to my drawer!

I lived with them in this house until about 18, when I started trying to move out and have my own space. I left my home three times to live with friends. I would have a small argument about moving out, and then I would always return home because the new places were not exactly right. I humbly returned home with my tail between my legs. Until one day, I finally moved and never returned, except to visit them on weekends. I moved to a nice place where I shared a house with Oswaldo, a friend I met at French Language school. I lived in this house until I left Brazil. I worked in a bank and had a managerial position then, so I made enough money to afford a nice place in a lovely part of São Paulo.

We all eventually married and had kids, except my brothers, Pedro and Mario. Pedro had some cognitive issues and never went beyond primary school. He always had aggressive behavior, which was a significant issue in a school setting. After my parents

passed away, he became a heavy alcoholic and drug addict. We all tried very hard to help him, but he has no personal desire to become productive and keeps destroying his life gradually. Pedro has very sensitive eyes, like a pair of high-quality binoculars. He has an incredible capacity to see and hear birds and loves the countryside, the trees, fishing, and drinking.

My brother Mario is also somewhat lost and lacks the will to stay focused on one job for long. Drinking seems to be part of Madrid's family DNA. No one has the interest to fight or the will to pursue their dreams. They have no urge to learn and keep learning.

I was the only one to pursue university studies; no one followed me. The others preferred to stay with unprofessional jobs and always struggled with their finances. Sometimes, I feel guilty for doing what I want, like traveling by airplane to the nicest Brazilian shorelines. Sometimes, I thought, "Don't feel guilty; you cross mountains to find your dreams." I had to work hard and still do to achieve my dreams. I may have lost many battles, but I never felt I lost the war. It is like a revolution; it takes painful turns, climbs, and declines to get into a state of freedom. And I believe anyone is capable of fighting and winning.

It is no surprise that my parents and siblings are proud of me. At the end of my teenage years, I became their mentor. We exchanged our roles: I was their parent. To this day, I provide sound advice and continual encouragement. I always emphasize the importance of encouraging their children to chase their dreams.



When we were kids, my father used to take us to catch frogs near my house. All we had to do was cross the street and walk less than a mile through some marshlands. My father always knew the right spot for good meaty frogs. We would catch a dozen or so and bring them back home. My father would clean each one, and then my mother would wash them, flour them with spices, and deep fry them. Before you think, “Eww,” you should know that frogs are used as a food source worldwide, and especially in my house during my childhood. They are tasty, a cross between fish and chicken.

On a frog-catching trip, my oldest sister Angela joined us.

She was five years older and always ahead of me in school, dating, and other things, so we did not interact much. She was forced to take me out a few times with her boyfriend – the only way my father would allow her to go out. I remember that being tedious.

On that day, my father brought Angela a fishing rod because she did not like catching frogs. She was determined to catch a fish to prove her superiority and that she could do whatever she wanted. After a few minutes, she spotted a fish approaching her line. She signaled that she had spotted a fish and to be careful and not make any noise. She whispered, "It's biting." She was very excited and focused on the fish.

As she got ready to pull the fish, I purposely made a lot of noise. I even stepped into the stream, splashing the water to ensure the little fish would escape. My sister went mad. Her rage made her legs and arms stronger. I was younger, but a faster runner. I ran for my life. She grabbed a pointy rock from the ground and, without any hesitation, threw it and hit the right side of my head, just above my ear. My face looked like it was washed in blood. Any other kid would have done the same. I had undoubtedly betrayed her.

The good part of this memory is that I do not recall the stone hitting my head. I only have a small scar from it to prove it, but it is hidden in my hair so that no one can see it. When we grew up, Angela told me she regretted her actions.

That marked the end of the frog-catching day. My father and sister took me home and treated the wound themselves.

In the end, Angela was severely punished: she was prohibited from watching TV at Aunt Luiza's house for a month. If you ask my sister to retell this story, you can hear her remorse in her words today. I never remember disliking her then or now. I do not recall the rock, the blood, or the punishment.

Except for this incident, I don't recall any major arguments with my sister.

All I remember from that evening is the frog legs I did not have for dinner.



I remember taking one of Angela's African dolls as a prop for a community theater production, but I do not recall returning it.

The amusing part is that I always heard Angela say the doll was hers. I felt terrible for never returning it, so many years later, I gifted her a beautiful new black doll and a brief apology poem. She loved it.

When my youngest sister, Arlete, discovered I had given Angela the doll, she pointed it out and said it belonged to her, not Angela. I had to buy another lovely African doll with a short poem for Arlete. I trusted that Arlete was right. Today, I feel I got even with both.

I found the poem I wrote for Arlete on her birthday in 2022, November 23, written in Portuguese. Here is the translation into English:

Youngest Doll Sis

Dear youngest sister,
I return your doll,
Sorry for the memory confusion,
Our accounts are now settled.

Play with the doll,
Leave behind the hard life,
Travel the planet,
Forget the adult at home.

Let your child scream,
No one will take her pacifier away,
Jump over the wall, go dance in hiding,
Go dreaming in magical dresses.

Take this youngest doll with you,
She wants to play and breathe every second of the universe.



I have a framed photo from my first year of elementary school, dated 1965, hanging on my office wall. I also have a 1969 school report card. It was my graduation year, and the reports show a closing average of 95 (Ótimo = Excellent).

I still feel proud of that grade because school didn't start well for me. However, I soon became one of Mrs. Jandira's top students. She was my elementary teacher, and I remember her very clearly. She was a petite woman with rosy cheeks who always smiled at her students' achievements. I am delighted to see her name signed in ink on my diploma: Prof. Jandira Ferraz Bonadia, December 13, 1969.

ANO DE 1969

GRUPO ESCOLAR PROF. ANGELINA MADUREIRA grau 2º ano

Aluno: Luiz Roberto da Costa de mat. 569

Mês	Comportamento	Lim. que gen.	Art. pratica	Cont. Garas	Faltas	Assinatura do Responsável	Nota Escolar
Fev.						<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	<u>0,20</u>
Março	<u>1,0</u>	<u>2,0</u>	<u>3,0</u>	<u>4,0</u>		<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	<u>113</u>
Abril	<u>1,0</u>	<u>2,0</u>	<u>3,0</u>	<u>4,0</u>		<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	
Mai	<u>1,0</u>	<u>2,0</u>	<u>3,0</u>	<u>4,0</u>		<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	
Junho	<u>1,0</u>	<u>2,0</u>	<u>3,0</u>	<u>4,0</u>		<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	
Julho	<u>1,0</u>	<u>2,0</u>	<u>3,0</u>	<u>4,0</u>		<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	
Ago	<u>1,0</u>	<u>2,0</u>	<u>3,0</u>	<u>4,0</u>		<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	
Set.	<u>1,0</u>	<u>2,0</u>	<u>3,0</u>	<u>4,0</u>		<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	
Out.	<u>1,0</u>	<u>2,0</u>	<u>3,0</u>	<u>4,0</u>		<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	
Nov.	<u>1,0</u>	<u>2,0</u>	<u>3,0</u>	<u>4,0</u>		<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	
Dez.	<u>1,0</u>	<u>2,0</u>	<u>3,0</u>	<u>4,0</u>		<u>Luiz R. Costa</u>	

Eliminado em: / / 1969

PROFESSOR _____

BOLETIM DE ALUNO

Município: S. Paulo 4º D. E. Elementar: Capital

Grupo Escolar: Prof. Angelina Madureira

Rua: Frei Galvão B.V. Carolina

Nome: _____

IDENTIDADE DO ALUNO

Nome: Luiz Roberto da Costa

Nascido a: 1 de 8 de 1958 em: S. Paulo

Estado: S. Paulo País: Brasil

Filh. O de: João Madureira da Costa Nacionalidade: Bras.

Profissão: pedagogo de: Unespa

Residência do aluno - Rua: Cal. Tristão Profissão: Arquiteto

Bairro: V. Anália N.º: 3

Desaja o ensino da religião: catolico

Assinatura do responsável: _____

Aprovado com a média: 95 (noventa e cinco) em o direito de matricular-se _____ no grau primário

em: S. Paulo, 14 de: Dezembro de 1969

Paulina P. Bonacio Professor _____

A parent was required to sign the report card every month. Since my mother could not sign her name, my father took on this responsibility. In 1969, my father signed regularly each month from the beginning of school in February through October, but for some reason, he did not sign for November and December. I probably made up a good excuse to explain his absence, like saying my father was sick or absent. He would be in one of his alcoholic hallucinatory states, in which he couldn't walk. However, my father attended my graduation ceremony when the diplomas were handed to the students.

Boys wore short-sleeved shirts, dark shorts, leather shoes, or sneakers with white socks as part of the public school uniform. White shirts were a requirement; I only had two hand-sewn linen pairs, and my mother would manage to keep them clean. I could not play in those shirts, and I got into trouble a couple of times because I got them dirty.

My mother would hand-wash my white shirts. She did all the laundry with her tired hands for the entire family. The shirts would quickly dry outside on a wire clothesline in the backyard, except on rainy days. She used a heavy, hot charcoal ironing press to make my cotton shirts look new.

I remember the compartment on the top of the heavy iron that held hot pieces of charcoal. We also had a regular charcoal stove, which my mom used to cook daily meals, and she would use the gas oven for special meals on the weekends.

Our family was from the lower middle class. These families had an income slightly above the poverty line, likely falling within the second or third lowest income brackets. They were often characterized by necessities met, but with limited discretionary spending. Many were blue-collar workers with stable jobs in urban areas, unable to afford their homes. We were an exception since we had owned our home since I was three.

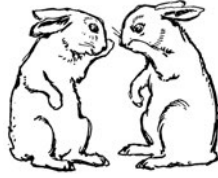
A “middle-class” family typically had a relatively stable income. These people were usually professionals, small business owners, or white-collar workers. My father was a general maintenance worker (carpenter, painter), and my mom took care of the kids and the house, cooking, washing, and market shopping—she worked the hardest of all of us!

The upper-class kids would go to private schools.

My thick white linen shirts looked very wrinkled at first wear, no matter how well my mother would have ironed them. My shorts were hand-sewn and had no pockets. The other boys wore the nicest, cut, industrialized, sewn pairs of shorts. I had no white leather sneakers like theirs. I wore regular Havaianas¹⁵ or leather sandals.

Some boys wore nice, ironed, fine cotton shirts with a white undershirt underneath and underwear, which I do not remember exactly when I started wearing.

¹⁵ **Havaianas** (stylized in [all lowercase](#)) is a Brazilian brand of [flip-flop](#) sandals created and patented in 1962. The brand was founded by Brazilian manufacturer [Alpargatas S.A.](#). Inspired by the Japanese [zori](#) sandals, Havaianas became the first mass-produced flip-flops made out of rubber



Between seven and nine years old, I had a few paying jobs. I worked as a grocery clerk near my house and, on the weekends, sold ice cream pops at soccer games. My father built a wooden shoeshine box and insisted it was a good source of income. I tried a few times but never enjoyed shining people's shoes. The customers were never satisfied and I did not make enough tips.



I also had another critical job at my parents' house: caring for rabbits, an unpaid torture.

We had a huge backyard and what was almost a little farm. We had all sorts of animals, including chickens, ducks, turtles, dogs, birds, and a few guinea pigs that belonged to my younger siblings. My father brought home a young crocodile on one of his out-of-state fishing trips. The poor creature! My younger wild brother Pedro provoked it so much that my father had to give it away.

I had two mixed mutts as pets: Bob, a mutt mixed with a golden retriever, and Astor, a mutt mixed with an Irish Setter. I also had a friendly blackbird that would perch on my hand. Like most families living in a house, it was common to have a parrot—its wings needed to be trimmed so it wouldn't fly away.

I was responsible for feeding a colony of rabbits. They lived in a small shed built by my father with chicken wire in the backyard. The shed had several floors, and the rabbits moved up and down throughout the day. They procreated like weeds.

We could only afford to serve them fresh hay. It sounds easy, but we did not buy hay in a store. I had to go to the woods and cut fresh hay every day. My father used to say that hay was a vital food for rabbits; it was high in fiber and helped with intestinal health. It also helped wear down their continuously growing teeth. I remember that they ate a lot.

I hated filling out an old cloth bag with hay, carrying it home, and feeding the rabbits. Cutting the hay in the woods was not fun, especially during hot summer days. Mosquitoes flew into your eyes. I remember stepping in wasp nests; their stings would swell my neck and face. I hated the job, but I had no choice. I had to feed them and keep the rabbit empire clean.

Cleaning the rabbit coop was another nightmare. The rabbits' strong urine smell reminded me of my incontinence, but their smell was much more pungent than mine. To help decrease the odor, I would tie a handkerchief around my nose during the cleaning.

My father was earnest about this responsibility and would not allow me to skip a day. I often got in trouble when I avoided these chores and sometimes felt mistreated.

One day, my father gave me a lapin, a rabbit-hair fur hat, sewn by himself, probably from the skin of one of the rabbits I fed. As far as I remember, I never wore it, but I always kept it as a special gift. Later, in my twenties, I gave it to my youngest brother, Pedro.

I did not want to keep the rabbits or my incontinence in my head.



Englishing

I believe my incontinence, which had plagued me throughout adolescence, disappeared like a “miracle of saints” right after I decided to start working and earning my own money, not as an ice pop vendor or grocery clerk, but as a professional. My father had to complete a lot of paperwork and special authorizations to allow a minor to hold a work permit. The legal age was 14. As a 13-year-old minor, I felt proud of my first work permit. In Brazil, a work permit resembles a passport (a passport to enter the working class). It contains about 50 pages; each job, salary, and title is stamped and recorded as proof of employment.

I started my career in an office. In my first job, I worked as an office runner (in Brazil, we call it an office boy). However, I was different from other runners. I was the factory president’s office runner. I received a recommendation from Rosamaria, a friend of my sister. She was the president’s secretary. I was responsible for delivering interoffice mail. One of Rosamaria’s duties was to type the interoffice correspondence manifest. I had to take them to other offices, carrying legal documents, electrification tower blueprints, and billing and payment checks. I would take mail from the factory

to the downtown headquarters office and vice versa several times a day. All this travel was done on public buses.

Rosamaria was very possessive of her manual Olivetti typewriter. She would not let me use it at all, and she started suspecting I was using it during lunch breaks. One day, she purposely left an unfinished document she was typing with four pages of carbon copies to prevent me from using it. She would leave the carbon copies rolled into the typewriter page in the middle of a word.

Well, for me, there was never a limit. I learned how to remove the bundle of pages with carbon copies, use the typewriter, and artfully put it back in the exact space on the page. Eventually, she went on maternity leave and never returned. The company hired a new secretary: Norma.

She was a young professional with round glasses. She was my first professional tutor and a bilingual (English/Portuguese) executive secretary. I remember seeing a document written in English for the first time. I thought, *how could someone read and write in another language?* Norma explained that I could also learn to read and speak another language. She helped me find a school where I could study English. The possibility of communicating in another language fascinated me.

She ordered an IBM Selectric II Correcting Typewriter, a modern invention in 1971. Today, you can get this vintage machine for about \$100.

She gave me the Olivetti typewriter, and I was thrilled to be responsible for typing and preparing the interoffice mailing manifest.

She sent me to a typing school, and soon, I could type without looking at the keyboard. I still remember typing full pages with *A S F G* with my left hand, *H J K L* with the right, and using my thumbs for the space bar.

I fell in love with typing words, and my salary increased slightly. I did not expect that I would digitize words and numbers one day to help me tell you this story.

Norma's husband worked for Danone, an American dairy product manufacturer. Every morning, she would bring me a variety of yogurts to taste. Norma and I became good friends, and she was an excellent professional mentor.

My daily routine changed when I started secondary school (I was 15 years old). I got up at 6:30 a.m. and took a crowded bus to work (about 40 minutes from home). Around 5 p.m., I would take another bus downtown, stop for English classes, and then take another bus to an evening technical high school (accounting). After school, I took another bus home, arriving after 11 p.m.

My mother always had a dinner plate on the kitchen table waiting for me. Many evenings, my mother was still up, handwashing the dishes and cleaning the kitchen. My mother never allowed dirty dishes to sit in the sink overnight. I always tried to wait until my mom finished cleaning the kitchen before bed.

We would talk about things that happened during the day. I remember asking her to ensure that a particular shirt I needed would be clean and ready to wear on a

special occasion. Today, I think I was rude for giving her extra work. This routine lasted for years.

I learned a lot of English, and my scores were consistently high on every test I took. During technical high school, my English teacher and I only spoke English in class, and everybody else would get jealous. I would study my English books in the big cafeteria at the factory. I had a skinny body, wore glasses, and learned while eating.

The cafeteria was a big hall with many tables. Most workers, wearing dark navy blue uniforms, would wait in line to grab their food, which was placed directly on steel trays. I ate like a blue-collar worker.

At the other end of the hall, on the opposite side of the food serving counter, was a long table covered in white linen for the executives. They were served food on ceramic dishes and could eat as much as they wanted. My big boss, the company's president, would sit at the center of the table. He was an Italian engineer with a pleasant smile who always nodded when he saw me.

His son was about my age and would come to the office occasionally. I remember how clean and well-educated the child was. He had an angelic, sweet face, remarkable blue-colored eyes, and a transparent eyelid, like a delicate young petal. He ate like a little prince with small bites. I was so jealous of him, what he possessed, his power, and possibly access to get everything he wanted,

that he could expect much more from his father than I could. His skin was thin, like porcelain. His eyes, lips, nose, fingers, and voice were all delicate.

I had promotions and advancement opportunities. First, I worked as an assistant analyst in the chemistry laboratory. The company erected and galvanized electrification towers. All the steel purchased was tested for iron strength and safety standards. I had to test the acid pH, which was used to wash and galvanize the iron structures. It was a terrifying job because I had to get close to the galvanization high-temperature tanks with liquid aluminum and collect the samples a few times daily. The samples were brought to the lab to ensure they met the chemical standards.

One day, there was an explosion, and a few workers died. The piece they were trying to galvanize was a round cylinder, and, with the high heat, it burst into the tank, spitting a burning silver liquid all over. I asked my boss to move me to another job. I tried other jobs. In the engineering department, I tried to learn how to draw new electrification towers in big blueprints. I was not too fond of it.

I worked in the accounting department. I had to add numbers from ledger cards to report on balance sheets, so I stuck with accounting for a while. To this day, I can add a massive list of numbers to a big calculator without looking at the keyboard. My fingers memorized the position of the keys.

The factory I worked for announced that external American auditors from General Electric (GE, which owned more than 50% of the company) were coming to audit the books. They were looking for someone who knew English.

Even though I was not ready, I raised my hand and was offered a job as a translator/interpreter. I had that job for many years and became a good translator, which was how I learned English.

When the American auditors came to the factory, they sat at the big, white-linen-covered table for lunch. They did not eat off steel trays like all blue-collar workers. And who was sitting next to them, along with other executives, at the long, white-linen-covered dining table?

Of course, it was me. I was the office boy who one day became an official interpreter. I occasionally glanced back and waved to some colleagues I knew. They smiled at me, acknowledging our connection.



I used to watch soap operas with my mom. She believed the stories were real and would comment about the main female characters. She used to say: “Oh, Essa aí é *danada*.² (This one is *Danada*.)

My mother appreciated a woman who dressed elegantly, something she could not afford to do, not independently. She knew about beauty because she was a gorgeous woman when she was young! She reminds me of the beautiful face of Ava Gardner mixed with the simple, petite, and deep eyes of Katherine Hepburn.

I like to talk about my mother because she was simple. She was not an extravagant woman. It was easy to tell whether she was happy, sad, or between. She would spend most of her hours working in the house, cooking, shopping for food at street markets, and caring for all of us. She was quiet and never made any drama about anything. She chose to be this way.

² *Danada* is a Brazilian Portuguese slang. It means something like a woman who is smart. Depending on the context, it would be pejorative

You usually saw her leaving the chicken coop with a semi-live, nice, fat hen. She held it by its feet, and the hen's head hung dizzily in despair. My mom had a small frame but was a strong woman. She would finish the job sitting outside on a wooden bench with the dead hen in a big aluminum bowl with hot water pots. I still remember the smell of burnt feathers from the plucked chicken on the ground. On those days, we had a delicious roasted chicken.

I continue to make simple meals like my mother: rice and beans, one or two fried eggs, a vegetable or salad. My mom taught me to be happy and straightforward with simple cooking.

We ate rice and red beans, a vegetable or salad, and a *Mistura*³. This was the daily menu, except on Sundays, when we had spaghetti with canned tomato sauce and shredded parmesan cheese from a brand that came in small blue plastic bags.

My sisters would bake a cake, make watermelon-flavored gelatin, or prepare the most popular ice cream recipes in an ice cream maker they had won in a raffle.

³ In Brazilian family meals, *Mistura* is the protein part of the meal (chicken or bovine meat, pork, others like frogs, eggs).

My mother preferred to peel some oranges with a small knife for dessert. She taught me how to peel an entire orange without breaking the peel. I was lazy and enjoyed joking with her about a bird flying in the sky. I would say, 'Wow, look at the bird, Mom!' She would turn her head, and I would sneak a few pieces of peeled oranges from her plate.

My mother never really opposed my ideas, wishes, or preferences. She was quiet and shy, except when angry, which was very rare. I remember telling her I was continuing my studies and planning on attending college soon. She said, "Luiz, you have already studied all these years. Isn't it time to stop studying? You are always overdoing things!"

My mother was illiterate. My sisters and I tried to teach her how to read numbers and words. We bought her a notebook and encouraged her to learn how to write, at least her name, like some of her sisters and my aunts. Legal procedures were challenging for her. She had to press her thumb on a blue ink pad to sign a document, which was proof of her signature.

My mother once tried to sit down with a pencil in her fingers. She looked at the blank page and attempted to figure out where to use that pencil. She interrupted the class, saying, "I have more important work to do at home. It's time to clean the beans."

My family used to buy 50 kilograms (about 100 pounds) of beans each month. The beans were fresh from the countryside but were presented as harvested beans, not fully ready for consumption. We would find pieces of red, dirty earth the size of a regular grain and some bad beans. My mom would select the best beans by shaking them in a large woven straw basket.

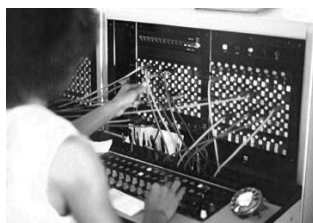
After that single attempt, she never tried to learn how to read or sign her name. However, my mom had memorized the colors and numbers of the two buses and one streetcar she had to take to visit her mom, Grandma Palmira, who lived on the other side of the city. She had to make connections downtown. She would get onto the bus or streetcar and confirm the destination as she paid for the fares.

She got lost a few times when some detours or roads were closed due to construction, forcing the buses to change their itinerary. She needed help reading the warning signs.

She would do all this work herself; she did not depend on somebody else to help her because she could not read. Also, she knew how to deal with money, except when the Treasury Department demanded new currencies and put new bills with different colors or layouts into circulation. She spent her money very carefully. She was responsible for shopping at street markets every Sunday and knew the best deals would be at the end of the day.

I went to Sunday's street market with her several times. The best part was eating pastel⁴ and drinking freshly squeezed sugar cane juice after shopping.

⁴ half-circle or rectangle-shaped thin-crust pies with assorted fillings, that can be savory or sweet, and fried in vegetable oil



I like to believe that I inherited a touch of my father’s artistic genius. His skillful, creative hands and how he expressed himself and engaged with others left me with remarkable memories. I am undoubtedly the son of a genius father.

When I began my “registered” job as an office runner at 13, I noticed something that caught my attention: a PBX⁵, a kind of switchboard. It was positioned in the center of the main reception area of the visitors' room. The PBX sat atop a large desk, surrounded by modern mustard leather couches and tall, thin, ornamental trees and plants. It became visible only after you opened and entered the glass doors near the main factory entrance gate.

Behind the PBX, a receptionist wore a headset. She pulled and pushed, pushed and pulled the wires with both hands, and at every pull or push, we could hear a buzzer or a ring, triggering different blinking lights of multiple colors on this large front panel. I found it fascinating how she communicated simultaneously with so many people despite some repetition in her conversations. She would say,

⁵ PBX stands for Private Branch Exchange, a phone system that manages calls for a business. PBXs can handle incoming and outgoing calls, as well as internal communications.

SADE⁶ Good morning. How can I direct your call?

SADE: Good afternoon. How can I help?

SADE: Hi, sorry you have the wrong number!

SADE: Sure, I will connect you now. Don't hang up.

It was a sophisticated electronic machine, not just a simple telephone system. When I arrived at work every morning, I smiled at the receptionist and said, "Good morning." Then, I gazed at that talking machine with curiosity. I wished I could learn to operate that machine, but I was never allowed to.

Soon after, I, with the help of a few genius friends, created our own PBX. It was a simple communication model between two points, and instead of a telephone line, we used electricity. For this specific reason, we denied our younger siblings, who all wanted to join, access to the project meetings. We told them that at their age, they would be better off communicating with each other using empty tomato cans and a long string.

We connected a live electrical cable between my house and my neighbor's. Our PBX project was risky and illegal, but we proceeded anyway. We buried the electrical wires underground so that no one would notice them. The PBX had a buzzer button,

⁶ SADE = Sul America de Eletrificação (South American Electrification Company).

but we avoided using it because we could not find a quiet sound level. Instead, we built cable boards with lights at each end and devised an indescribable Morse code to send and read our secret messages. We had fun working on these projects together. We conducted our research and held several meetings before executing our plans. The front woodshed of my house was where we often met; it provided privacy for many enjoyable boys' activities, including the thrill of doing secretive things.

When my father discovered I used live electrical cables to build our PBX, he nearly killed me as he explained how hazardous that was. I had only a basic knowledge of electricity. He explained that I could have caused a short circuit and created a fire. He tried to prevent me from playing with my friends in our secret command center inside the shed, but luckily, back then, I was viewed as a good working son, which gave me some authority.

Fortunately, he changed his mind about punishing me when, under his supervision, I quickly disconnected the wires from the underground and promised I would never do that again. Spending time with my friends was crucial to me, and being inside the shed with my friends, with a locked door, was a way to gain some control, a territory where we could have our privacy.

Later, I was glad I could continue bringing my friends, and the shed was our favorite spot. My friends and I knew things about sex already, but there in the shed, we could discuss and demonstrate it openly.

At the time, it wasn't easy being me. I was never big or athletic; I was too fragile and different, which made me an excellent target for bullies. They always picked on me. During this period, I watched different superhero series on TV that featured both good and evil characters. This memory makes me wonder who the heroes were in my life back then. Maybe my brilliant friends were my heroes; they helped protect me from getting into trouble with other boys.

I played soccer because I was a fast runner, but that only lasted a couple of years. I became a cigarette smoker. It was easy to snag a cigarette from my father's pocket when he was sprawled on the floor, his body liquored up. My father often ordered me to get him cigarettes and, yes, beers, too. I remember carrying half a dozen 1-liter bottles in a bag.

All I needed to do was head to the neighborhood bakery with a large plastic bag. Seu Francisco, the owner, a Portuguese baker and a close family friend, would sell me beer and cigarettes, which my father had previously approved.

Seu Francisco or his wife, Dona Anita, understood that everything I bought was for my father. Seu Francisco was too busy to question me, and I was a good kid.

It was a great errand because I could keep the change, and I had the chance to sneak some beer and cigarettes for myself and my friends. Let me rephrase that: it was a terrible errand because I became a smoker and learned how to start drinking alcohol excessively. I began buying cigarettes with my money at 14 years old.

I tried to act tough, but that wasn't me. I liked building things, just like my father. He would look at my projects and say, "Not bad! " He sometimes allowed me to use his carving tools, especially his special handsaw. He had a lot of tools.

Marinho was a great childhood friend. We could trust each other, and he always defended me against the bullies. We played war games, and he would position himself closely behind me. It felt like having a comforting shield around me.

He and I built an intricate, fully detailed miniature model of an aircraft carrier. It measured 3 feet by 1 foot and was constructed from plywood, featuring three levels below the main deck with small compartments for the various cast metal aircraft we collected.

Marinho's father was in the military and held a high-ranking position, which may have influenced our project. We also built some defense mechanisms with the super-modern precision gun cylinders. It was the most detailed project I ever completed. The carrier featured a control tower with tiny plastic glass windows, multiple runways, and battery-operated navigation lights. I don't remember many other details, only that my friend and I spent countless hours building this perfect model together. We had a great time. That experience helped me realize I was feeling something new: the excitement of having an actual, unbreakable friendship. Five years later, I heard he had gotten married, and we never saw each other again. I think he followed his father's path and pursued a career in the military. He is probably doing well today.



My father had 10 siblings, all children of Luiza Madrid Bas and Felipe Manoel Costa, my paternal grandparents, whom I never met. My grandmother and two of her brothers fled Spain during *World War I* and settled in Brazil.

She met my grandfather when she arrived in *São José do Rio Preto*, a small town in the interior of *São Paulo*. My grandfather was from an unknown city in *Bahia*, a northeastern state of Brazil.

My paternal uncles were Uncle Felipe and Pedro; my aunts included Aunt Manuela, Aunt Inês, Aunt Carmen Iara, and Aunt Maria. I have never met Aunt Jacinta or Aunt Luiza Madrid (not to be confused with the other Aunt Luiza Ruiz, my Uncle Pedro's second wife, Luiza Ruiz).

The first two children of my parents died either at birth or when they were young. No one in my family who is still living has ever met them or has any information about these children. Brazil faced many plagues in the 1920s that resulted in the deaths of numerous children. I believed that could be the reason.

This was the Madrid family. All uncles, aunts, and cousins share the Spanish Madrid blood. Let me define what I mean by *Madrid Blood: a blood composed of courage, strength, and will. A blood that laughs, cries, fights, loves, and never surrenders.* Federico García Lorca would easily understand what I mean.

Grandma Luiza Madrid Bas was a powerful woman. Like any immigrant in the early 20th century, she had to work hard. She worked at many different things, and eventually, when she moved to São Paulo city (downtown), she managed a small pension selling soup plates. Later, the place became a small bed and breakfast.

Grandma Luiza separated from my grandfather after catching him with one of his daughters (Aunt Luiza Madrid) in an incestual relationship. Grandma ordered him to leave and never return home. He went and never returned.

During this time, Grandmother Luiza went through a significant financial hardship. All her kids were minors; the oldest was probably twelve to thirteen. At one point, she could not afford to take care of her kids, and they were taken into the custody of a state-controlled juvenile detention center. The boys were separated from the girls, who went to different places. My grandma could not afford a better place, like a temporary orphanage, or to send her children temporarily to another family member. Back then, all her family was probably in Spain or Argentina if they survived the war. The detention center was free.

None of my uncles or my father told their children anything about this experience, which was probably a terrifying trauma in their lives. But I am curious to

understand more. How can all my uncles and aunts make a pact not to share any information about this time with their children? The fact that my father, uncles, and aunts had to be mixed with young offenders bothers me. I could sense that they had been abused as children, were forced into heavy labor, or had some other work experience. Still, no one in my family has any information about this unfortunate period of my father's history.

My father hated his mother for apparently ruining his life. When my father was drunk, I could see a rage throbbing inside his thick, jugular, sweaty veins. His Spanish blood marched a fury of pulsating heartbeats. He would swear at his mother. My father was an alcoholic for many years of his life, and this "scene" with his mother was a familiar thing for all of us. However, we never understood what he was trying to say, except for what he called his mother. *Filha da Puta* (Motherfuck)!

After the detention center, he participated in a 12-month military training program to defend the country. This is a requirement for all Brazilian males, except those who receive an exemption, which applied to me. When I was 18, there was an excess of males, and I was relieved that I didn't have to undergo military training or learn how to handle a gun and be prepared to become a killing machine.

After his military accomplishments, my father became a general maintenance worker at *Diário Oficial da União* (Official Diary of the Union), the federal government printing company established in 1862. He learned how to paint houses and was skilled in plumbing and electrical work. I saw he was also a mason; he built our first house. I

was very curious about the newspaper printing process. I saw men with inky fingers hand-setting the metal letters until a full newspaper page was formed.

When we would go downtown together, he proudly pointed to a tall white building and asked, “Do you see that tall white building in the city's center?”

“I helped paint it,” he’d say, answering his question. The building is still there today. It is the headquarters of *Banco do Estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo State Bank), one of the tallest city buildings. It was always white with some red details, the state flag's colors.

There were fabulous uncles and aunts, except my Aunt Maria, who had evil Spanish blood. Just before he died, my father co-signed a lease agreement for Aunt Maria. My father passed away, and weeks later, my mother received a legal debt collection. Aunt Maria had never paid her rent bills, and my family had to sell our house to pay the charges. My family eventually was able to buy another home, but they lost a lot of cash in the transaction.

I have happy memories of my aunt Ines climbing mango trees with me in our backyard and eating green mangoes with salt. She smoked a pipe. I remember my Aunt Manuela, the most Spanish of my aunts, and her famous bone soup. My uncle Felipe could not hear very well, but was an excellent accordion player and gardener. My uncle Pedro became the most prosperous and worked for a graphic company. He was also the only one in the family with a car. He built a house next to ours on a piece of land

my father bought with lottery money. My father had a difficult life, but also a rare good fortune.

There is much more to share about my uncles and aunts. I lived with them for 30 years and have many memories, but I am still trying to find documents to learn more about them. I still don't know much, especially about my grandfather.



When I was already an adult, one of my cousins, Maria Helena (the oldest daughter of Aunt Manuela), told me a shocking story. All my aunts, except Aunt Inês and Aunt Manuela, became relatively wealthy later in life. They owned fancy apartments downtown São Paulo, and my Aunt Jacinta wore extravagant long faux fur scarves and coats. I have always wondered how they could afford such a sophisticated lifestyle.

The richest one was Aunt Jacinta, whom, again, I never met. Her life had a tragic ending. She was found dead in her apartment. The suspicion was that she had poisoned herself. When my family had to go to the morgue to confirm her identity, they noticed she had a purple bruise on one of her eyes. My family suspected she was killed by the police chief, with whom she was having a love affair.

After her death, my cousin told me that Aunt Jacinta's belongings, such as jewelry and extravagant clothes, were shared with other aunts and their daughters.

Aunt Luiza Madrid led a similar lifestyle, although her apartment and clothing were of lower quality than Aunt Jacinta's. She was the aunt whom Grandfather Pedro Manoel abused. The cause of her death remains unknown; no family member who knew her is aware of it. However, there is something significant about Aunt Luiza Madrid. She had a son, Paulo.

At the time of her death, Paulo was about 14 years old, and my uncles and aunts contested his custody. My father ultimately won the case and became his official guardian. As a condition, my father demanded that Paulo work hard and contribute to the family like his children. Paulo never accepted this and resented my father for requiring so much work from him. He escaped multiple times but was always found and forced to return home until one day he disappeared and was later discovered living in the city of *Rancharia*, a rural town in the western part of *São Paulo* state, with my Aunt Manuela.

Paulo lived with us until he turned eighteen, while I was between eight and ten. My father built a second woodshed for additional storage at the end of the property line. He added a bed, transforming the back shed into Paulo's designated bedroom, separate from the house.

Something new and somewhat extraordinary happened between me and Paulo in this woodshed. Paulo was initially the best cousin I had. It was like having an older brother. He would make me happy, giving me money and other gifts. I used to wait

for Paulo to arrive from work and stay in his bedroom. He always locked the door during the visits.

One particular evening, he said he had a thing to teach me. He showed me his erect member. I could not believe how it would get erect, and the size, much bigger than mine! I could not believe how hairy it was. I did not have hair in there until 11 or 12! I remember getting very curious about it. When my father used to take me to his job at the government printing company, all the workers had to shower at the end of the day. I was invited to join them with my father. I started to notice other guys' body parts, trying to compare them with my cousin's. Was I attracted to them?

Later, Paulo told me he needed help to get an erection because he had a heavy workday and was tired. He taught me how to jerk him off. We were somehow careful because my mother or father could knock at the door any moment, announcing it was time for dinner or something else, as if my parents suspected something was happening. I never told this story to anyone. It was a big secret.

If someone knocked at the door, we had to stop quickly doing whatever we were doing, pretending we were talking or doing something else.

Another day, he said he could produce milk with his male genitalia. I did not believe that was possible. He said he could show it to me, but I had to jerk his dick for a long time to prove he was capable. He said he could only make the milk come off if I did that work. Well, my curiosity pushed me to test his capacity. He was right,

and I was mesmerized by the quantity he produced. It was not milk but a thick white cream that smelled like chlorine. We repeated this activity a few times.

Paulo was cool. He would invite me and some other friends to follow him to the woods to see him having a relationship with a woman. No one would give us such a great opportunity. We had to hide behind the bushes and could not make any noise.

Ultimately, he said it was time for me to learn one more thing. He told me he was able to fit his entire manhood inside of me and deposited his milk so it would not be too messy to clean. That was a big challenge for me. Initially, he tried it gently a few times, and then he would stop. He said he could only produce milk if his humongous weenie were completely penetrated inside my body. After a few tries, he forced me to let him complete it. It was the most painful experience I had with all these incestuous, intimate games. I remember we tried to repeat the experience, but it took a long time to recover from the burning pain, and some blood used to come out after going to the bathroom or when I showered.

When Paulo finally left home for good, we stopped doing that, but I remember trying to repeat the experience with other guys, older brothers of my friends. That did not last long in my life.

I learned later that my cousin Paulo had a son with my cousin Sônia, the youngest of Aunt Manuela's daughters. In recent years, I have met Paulo's son, Fernando.

Fernando lives with another wonderful cousin, Sonia's second son, Fabiano (from another father).

Much later, I talked with my younger brother Mário and discovered that the same thing happened to him and Paulo.

Immediately after my father died, Paulo visited my mother, trying to claim some of the inheritance my father left for the family, poor mother. He told my mother he worked hard for my father and was his adopted son, so he felt he had to receive some of his wealth. There was no money or anything that my mother could give him. He asked to see the family photos while she cooked in the kitchen. He stole all the pictures of him and his mother from the family album.

The last I heard was that Paulo married an airline steward, but he was not good to her, and they separated. No one knows if he is still alive today.

I had my first girlfriend when I was 13. I loved kissing her, and my friends and I used to organize garage dances at a neighbour's garage. A friendly lady neighbor had a big house and at least twelve dogs. We always helped walk her dogs; in exchange, she let us use her garage.

We were geniuses and built our ballroom with terrific strobe lights. During the slow songs, we kissed our girlfriends passionately. A hickey around our necks was a must in our young teenage years. This girlfriend had two older sisters, and they played guitar and sang the Beatles, which I loved and could understand a little bit. I have

always wanted to be a singer, but never became a good one. Her oldest sister liked women, and one day, she asked me if I had ever been to a nightclub. I said I had never; I was a minor. She said she knew a nightclub in the red district in the center of São Paulo. She brought me there once. In the seventies in Brazil, we did not use the word “gay.” We used to say that people who liked same-sex partners were called “*entendido*”⁷. I was probably 16 years old. I managed to get in, but the nightclub was very dark inside and had both male and female people. She introduced me to a guy and left me alone with him. For the first time that night, without expecting it, the guy kissed me on the mouth. That was only one kiss, the first kiss with a man. I had kissed girls on the mouth, but the sensation was very different. That night, I went to bed with a new mixed feeling of pleasure and disgust. I had to hide this fact forever- a romance between two men. Was it possible? I was ashamed of my actions and was afraid my lips would spill the truth.

I saw men in relationships with men when I was older, especially in the theater. I had a few myself, but they never worked. However, one thing I knew was always present. The memory had stained my life with the mixed feelings of pleasure and pain that my cousin Paulo introduced. The pain was something I was never able to deal with, so my relationships with men did not work, whether I was in an

⁷ In Brazilian slang, “entendido” is a Brazilian term for a homosexual man, generally middle-class and leading a dual or closeted life. “he is entendido. This term could also be applicable for women, but for women, they had a special name “sapatão”. “She is a sapatão, meaning she wears big shoes.

active or passive relationship. During my early adulthood, I needed romance, love, and care. I was looking for a new male figure who would only give kindness.

I stopped with these activities, but I would always peek at other guys while at the gym and showering at school. I kept these memories locked in a closet for many years. Did they grow in me more pain or opportunities for pleasure?

Today, I feel that the pain caused by Paulo has significantly contributed to my urinary incontinence. I believe that during the night was the only time when the primary muscles of my pelvic floor could genuinely relax. Freedom for all, including my incontinence!



Sometimes, I play the lottery. I consider myself lucky with numbers, and I often win raffles or take home the grand prize. Have I won high-value prizes? No, I have not, but my father did.

I don't know how much money he won, but I do know that he bought a big piece of land and eventually built our first house with his winnings. My mother once told my sister that she remembers seeing my father show up with cash in a big paper bag. He was thrilled.

He built our tiny house on that land in a very remote area of the city, brick by brick. In addition to the house, he created an orchard and a mini-farm for small animals. I was between three and four when we moved from our first house. I do not remember the building of the second house, but I remember all the fruit trees we had in our new orchard.

He also used his winnings to buy various other items. He purchased and donated many children's clothing items, including blankets, candy, and toys, to a local orphanage in *São Paulo*.

As a family, we had very few material possessions, and suddenly, we found ourselves with so much “property” in our hands. My father became the owner of the land. Although we didn't become wealthy, we had our place. We built our house ourselves (my father did most of the work), grew our fruits and vegetables (my father took the lead on this), and cared for our fresh chickens and small farm animals like pigs and rabbits (I took care of the rabbits). To me, it felt like owning a piece of a continent.

With the funds, my father also bought unique gifts for his family. My sister got a light blue Ban-Lon skirt with a matching jacket. My mother got a brand-new pressure cooker, though I'm unsure if she considered it a gift. I got a new blue bicycle. I was about six then.

My bike was taller than I was, so my feet couldn't touch the ground. Shiny blue plastic ribbons hung from the ends of each handlebar, and the mudguard featured red details. However, it didn't come with training wheels.

At that time, I didn't know how to ride a bike. My father took the lead. He taught me to handle that uncontrollable thing. It was a simple training process that took a few runs to get the hang of. He helped me climb to the top of the seat and then pushed me and the bike down a long slope.

I remember having a lot of fun, but I also felt fear. I was afraid to get hurt. During the training, I was tired during one of the last runs and crashed my bike into something hard. I bent the front wheel, damaging my new toy. I also got hurt, but

nothing serious. I was very disappointed, but I learned how to ride a bike. That was the end of my new toy.

My father was a regular federal lottery player, a wise and skilled gambler of *Jogo do Bicho*,⁸ the animal game.

Jogo do Bicho was created in 1892 and has been legally prohibited since 1946. It began as a guessing game at a zoo, where animals were hidden behind a curtain, and visitors had to guess which one was behind it. The winner received a prize. Soon, it intrigued Brazilians searching for cash and struggling to survive a severe economic crisis. Cities like *Rio de Janeiro* and *São Paulo* still have many *bicheiros*.⁹

My father used to say he had a dream about something related to an animal or its behavior. For example, if he associated a situation in a dream where he felt the main character was “dumb,” the next day he would play in the *Burro* (Ass) and bet on the numbers: 09, 10, 11, 12. Each animal had its own set of numbers.

My father successfully turned dreams into numbers. If I dreamed about an animal, I would play those numbers in a Keno game. I won a few times, at least covering my expenses in the game.

Although I have not yet won a fortune, I continue to achieve other small wins, not only financial ones. Like my father, I also feel I have fortune in my life

⁸ *Jogo do Bicho*, an illegal gambling game in Brazil.

⁹ *Bicheiros*, the game center stores or the bankers financing the winnings from the money collected



When I was nearly 16, I discovered a few of my father's medals in an old shoebox in his dresser, mixed with some old jewelry. I inquired about the medals, but he was vague and didn't answer clearly. I wondered if I could keep one, so I asked him directly. He spoke in a low tone without looking me in the eye, saying, " Ah, I see. Do you want something to hold in your hands as a reminder of me one day after I'm gone?" I didn't hesitate and replied yes. I looked back at him, searching for his gaze, and smiled. I thought to myself, "Aren't we all going to die someday?"

He carefully examined the medals and proudly gave me two: one with an engraving, " À, João Madrid, 4x300 – 2:46, June 4, 1958." The second: "*To João Madrid, April 6, 1958*"



My father participated in running races and other types of competition, most likely associated with the Saint Silvester International Road Race¹⁰ (*Corrida Internacional de São Silvestre*). Historically, the first *São Silvestre* race was held on December 31, 1925, and the annual event was not interrupted or suspended until 2020, not even during *World War II*. It occurs on the major city roads, avenues, and parks of Greater São Paulo.

The other day, my oldest sister Angela told me about her conversations with my father regarding sports competitions, one of which involved a stick jumping contest. She said he would proudly display his medals and speak about his accomplishments. My only memory of those medals is his hidden eyes and what he shared with me—something that has stayed in my mind.

One medal is dated April 6, 1958, and the other June 4 of the same year. This means my mother was pregnant with me. I was born in early August 1958.

I was my father's first son after having two older daughters. Many people anticipated my birthday. For example, on my maternal side, I became the oldest grandson among 29 grandchildren.

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Silvester_Road_Race

It is comforting to think he spent time engaging in physical activities beyond work and other addictive hobbies. I felt a positive impact on his life, and the fact that it was when my mother was expecting me makes it a very special moment for me.

He was also a strong swimmer, with a muscular physique and the looks of a movie star. The old black-and-white family photos show him dressed elegantly in his white cotton suit and matching straw hat. He also enjoyed riding his bicycle. He had a classic and charming look but was also a troublemaker with women. At parties, you could easily spot my father with his happy, somewhat inebriated, hilarious, dirty jokes that would generate loud laughter. He loved celebrating life.

I remember when we visited Aunt Jovina, my mother's sister. Her husband, Uncle Antonio (a fabulous Italian uncle), and my father would play *bocce* near my uncle's house. My father had a superb technique and consistently achieved excellent scores. I recall watching him play billiards, consistently collecting the highest bets.

Although I couldn't find my father's name on any official Saint Silvester Race winners' lists, I like to keep these medals close at hand. My father was a winner for participating in and celebrating a healthy part of his life. If I have time, I will pass these medals on to my boys so they have something tangible to hold, hopefully reminding them of me and my father one day after I'm gone.



During the best part of my teenage years, I struggled to survive as an actor but could not earn enough money to cover all my expenses. I also had to help my family pay household bills, such as electricity and property taxes, or buy a gas cylinder for my mom to cook.

My father would not allow us to avoid our financial obligations or household chores. Everyone had to contribute.

Those years were full of revolt. I often thought I did not ask to be born, and why should I now be obligated to work to sustain a family I never asked for—a typical teenage existential issue! I used to resent my father for not providing us with enough. Today, I see how much I learned from him and how much he gave to me and my family. He offered all he could afford; even though it was not enough, he did his best.

At 17, I held various part-time jobs. I worked as an English teacher and translator, but the income was insufficient. I preferred dedicating my time to theater and art. Surviving as an artist was uncertain then; my father never endorsed the idea. To him, a respectable man wakes up early, goes to work,

returns for dinner regularly, and saves enough to buy a house—things he seldom accomplished.

My routine was different. I used to wake up around noon and start my day with theater rehearsals and dance classes. I studied theater, as well as classical and modern dance. If I could catch the last bus, I would return home by 1 a.m.; otherwise, I would come home at 6 a.m. the next day. I remember walking home from downtown, about an hour and a half away; however, it was challenging, so I only did it a few times.

That's when I began meeting my first real friends, some still alive 40 years later. I was growing up and started learning about life, people, and other things beyond myself, my family, and my childhood.

Like my father, I was never afraid to try new things. I immediately identified with theater, and for a while, I promised never to give up. I studied it for about five years and helped with a Portuguese translation project of *A Streetcar Named Desire* by T. Williams. I still dream of performing *Lucky's* role in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

The theater helped me connect with feelings I was already familiar with: fear, loneliness, revolt, and desperation to learn about my family's story. I also loved the physicality of theater, where our bodies serve as a home for all emotions and images. At the theater school, we practiced deep body exercises to engage with heavy emotions, which helped me release my feelings and represent them more realistically when

acting. Theater was a fantastic way to express my feelings and better understand myself. It provided the hope that all human beings need. Theater made me stronger.

I met Vavá (Evaristo), my theater mentor. Vavá was a professional actor, magician, clown, and a great friend. He helped me create my clown character, and along with another close friend, we formed a small children's entertainment business that offered various activities, primarily for young children, including shows and fun games at birthday parties. We earned good money performing as clowns or other popular children's characters like Batman & Robin. I took on the role of Robin because I was young and skinny, unlike my friend Evaristo, who always played Batman due to his more robust build. When our third friend was available, Soninha assumed the role of Batgirl. We portrayed many different children's characters.

Evaristo helped me create my clown character, and I still have two different outfits sewn by Vava's grandma, waiting for an opportunity: wigs and all the makeup supplies.

I once dressed as a clown because two young children lived in my small condo. Being in a clown costume reminded me of the old days.

Evaristo taught me a trick. Usually, small children are afraid of clowns, but during one of our entertainment shows, we discovered that children are not scared if they see the actor transforming into a clown. It was simple: we

asked the kids to help paint a clown face on us. By the end of our show, all the kids had funny clown faces. The kids painted their own following our act. Evaristo taught me to pay attention to human behaviors and their mannerisms in small details. He used to tell me, "You must build a library of common human traits to become a strong actor."

I performed at least one play a year, including professional acting, and directed at least two.

Through these diverse artistic experiences, I began incorporating body-warming exercises and relaxation techniques to prepare actors before they performed live on stage. I had the opportunity several times to perform clown acts in a live circus. I was captivated by the chance to interact with children and the limitless possibilities for playfulness through ludic games and language.

This experience reminded me of my father, who used to do a unique kid trick, and I used to love it. He would take his handkerchief (he always had one with him), roll it magically, and turn it into a rat with a long tail. Then, he would place it over one of his forearms. He would introduce the rat and tell a story about a rat and a cat. At one point in his story, he suddenly pulls the end of his handkerchief without anyone noticing (the rat's tail), and the rat runs away. I loved to see the children's

reactions and surprise. Their bright eyes were full of curiosity and fear. My father was a good actor and had a good sense of humor.

My father never had time to see my theater productions, although once, he gave me some great plastic whiteboards to build a flying saucer for one of the children's play sets (*The Clown from the Green Planet*).

He kept almost everything made of metal, cables, and wires. He didn't have a hoarding disorder but rather a conscious recycling mindset. I still hear him saying, "Don't throw that away; we can always use it for something else one day."

I eventually got a fantastic job at a local bank. For work at the bank, I wore a suit and tie, and for my artistic activities, I carried a large leather bag filled with clothes, books, dancing shoes, and other gear, along with an extra set of clothes for overnight stays. That was important because it helped me save time and avoid taking the bus home to change before heading back into town during rush hour. I remember arriving at the dance school, struggling to fit my tired and swollen feet into my dancing shoes. I wore formal shoes for my bank job, a hard 8-hour shift. I often felt embarrassed since I was the only dance student in that condition. The other students were young adults who did not seem to understand the meaning of the word "job."

I could not afford to invest further in my artistic career, as I did not have financial support from anyone. However, it was a great experience lasting

around five years. This period was the most challenging and rewarding time of my teenage years—a passion for the arts that never left my heart.

Ultimately, my position at the bank led me to international trade finance, working with foreign trade, a career that took me to numerous global locations.

Vavá passed away one year after I moved from Brazil to the United States, leaving a significant void in our hearts. Of my 13 close Brazilian friends, only four are alive today. My desire for theater still burns like an eternal natural gas pipeline, but writing is what has been keeping my blood flowing.



I never went to a movie theater, watched a concert, or talked about a book with my father.

His lifestyle sometimes made him feel alone and isolated. He spent most of his time drinking and complaining about how his mother mistreated him. He would spend the entire day drinking at bars near our house. I went to the bars several times to help him walk home. I drank with him at the bar, but that did not last long. Every time my father was inebriated, he began denigrating his mother. I wondered how difficult it must have been for him to articulate that feeling. What about his father? What did my father think about his father? The truth is that no one in the family knows or talks about him.

I am still trying to uncover pieces about my grandfather, where he came from, and who he was as a man. However, I found no public record to help me identify more.

I learned that he was from Bahia, the largest northern state of Brazil, where the first country's capital served as a seat for the Portuguese colonial administration from 1549 to 1763.

So, one day, I invited my father to travel to Salvador, the capital and largest city in Bahia. I asked, "How about going on an adventure with me? I will cover the expenses. It is a gift."

His eyes opened bright and fast, like missiles shooting in the sky, and he said yes. Let's go to Bahia!

It was a big adventure. We took a bus from São Paulo, and after 8 hours, we arrived at our first stop, Minas Gerais¹¹, another historical Brazilian state, home of precious and semiprecious stones, diamonds, and gold. Then, during the next four nights, we traveled to Salvador on a commercial barge and motored up the São Francisco River.

All travelers had to sleep and rest their tired bodies in hammocks on the main open deck. Another twenty or so young adventurers my age were on this mission to ascend the Rio São Francisco (San Francisco River), which connects the northeast to

¹¹ Minas Gerais - is one of the 27 federative units of Brazil, The state's terrain is quite rugged and some of Brazil's highest peaks are located in its territory. It is also home to the source of some of Brazil's main rivers, such as the São Francisco. The state has the largest production of various precious and semi-precious stones in the country.

the south. Perhaps this trip could connect my father's story to his father, or it would connect my father's story with me.

The food was terrible, and the barge made various stops to load and unload cargo, including new tires, water pumps, bulk construction materials, live chickens, goats, and other small animals—anything that could fit onto the barge. It was a long trip and one of the region's primary means of public transportation.

My father and I quickly became known. I was the only one traveling with my dad. Others in the group traveled with a friend or partner, but I was traveling with my father, a new friend I wanted to make. We were allowed to disembark at each stop, visit the local markets, do some quick shopping, return to the boat, and continue the trip. At first, my father struggled to find something to do. Then, he bought a roll of nylon line and hooks at one of the stops. He spent his evenings fishing just before sunset when the bugs began to swarm, buzzing at dusk, eager for human blood. He caught some fish for fun and then returned them to the water. Some young people from the group asked if they could try to catch a fish for dinner. It was enjoyable. He captured everyone's attention and started forming new friendships. The boat crew recognized him well.

One of the travelers brought a guitar, and we sang under the moonlight each night. The guitarist was from *Minas Gerais* and was familiar with all the popular songs of the renowned Brazilian singer *Milton Nascimento*, also from *Minas Gerais*. Even my

father knew some of the lyrics. We sang on board a vessel floating up an endless river. The trip felt like an eternity spent with my father.

I found a lovely picture of my father from this journey. He was wearing black-and-white All-Star sneakers. His charm and youthful smile captivated the young women on board. When the ship stopped temporarily, the young couples on the boat would buy my father fresh fruit from the market. Some of them began calling my father “Uncle João.” Everyone wished him a good day in the morning, giving him a chance to talk with others about his day and plans. He had a warm, inviting smile.

He got sick during the boat trip for a few days—nothing more than a light cold. I made sure I kept my eyes on my father’s health. The boat made about ten or more stops, a long and tiring journey. When we stopped at major ports, we bought fresh fruit and drinks. At some stops, we had cold beers to help keep us fresh. The food, mainly proteins, was the most challenging part of the trip.

Eventually, we arrived in Salvador, where we stayed at an old bed and breakfast. My father was still recovering from his cold, so I suggested we take some time apart. One of the friends I made on the boat trip invited me to visit *Morro São Paulo*, a car-free village on the northeastern tip of Brazil’s Tinharé Island in the Atlantic Ocean. *The Fortress of Tapirandu*, built in the 17th century and now in ruins, offers a stunning sea view. I stayed on the island for only a couple of nights.

A few days later, we met again in Salvador. His eyes seemed to have missed me, though he would never admit it. It was time to return home to São Paulo. I had booked a flight for the journey back. It was my father's first flight.

He was very anxious. He did not know what he was going to experience. He was worried the plane would go so fast that it would miss when it flew over major Brazilian land cities like Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, and Rio de Janeiro.

I explained that we would be flying at least 30,000 feet high, and he could not see it from the window. I helped him fasten his seat belt and showed him the closest emergency exit door.

Soon, he appeared comfortable, with a light, fearful look as the plane took off. When we reached a reasonable altitude, he could contemplate the most beautiful northeastern Brazilian shoreline—a wonderful blend of blue seas, green vegetation, and golden sands reminiscent of the vivid paintings made by the famous Tarsila do Amaral.¹²

We had a beer with our lunch. We were having fun until the turbulence started.

It was one of the most turbulent flights I have ever taken, but I tried to make it as pleasant as possible for my father. I told him, “ It is a bit windy today. “

¹² Tarsila de Aguiar do Amaral was a Brazilian painter, draftswoman, and translator. She is considered one of the leading Latin American modernist artists, and is regarded as the painter who best achieved Brazilian aspirations for nationalistic expression in a modern style

To help him get distracted, I began talking about the incredible trip we had just taken together on the *São Francisco River*. Before we knew it, we arrived safely in São Paulo without turbulence.

Proudly, my father told everyone about this trip for many years of his life.



When I told my parents I was moving to the United States in 1987, my heart was excited, but the thought of distancing myself from my family and friends was still hard to digest.

My mother did not oppose my idea, but didn't understand how far the United States was; she thought I could continue visiting her in Brazil every weekend as I used to. At that time, I was living in a rented house and had bought my first car, and it was enjoyable to take my mom to the countryside of São Paulo, where she was originally from.

My father immediately approved the idea of moving to the States. He said: "This country is full of shit, full of crooks. You will be much luckier in the States." However, his eyes were directed at the wall, not me, when he said that. For some reason, he could not show the feelings in his eyes.

After so many hard years of dealing with health, alcoholism, and his harrowing life story, he and I made so much progress in our son-father relationship. It was sad to leave Brazil and interrupt decades of work on that relationship. I knew it would be different, and I would miss my whole family terribly.

The preparations to move to the States began. *What should I take with me besides a lifetime of memories?* I knew it would be hard to return and visit Brazil often. My luggage couldn't fit everything I wanted to bring. My life was already too long and full of things I couldn't separate myself from so quickly.

I had my LPs, cassette tapes, videos, books, ceramic pieces, my father's wood statues and paintings, notebooks, love letters, two clown costumes, and other nature souvenirs from forests, parks, and oceans.

All these items have been my life tokens, and I still carry them today.

My father surprised me. With his great carpenter hands, he built a wooden trunk. He said, " You can put the things you cannot fit into your luggage in this," and dispatched the trunk via ship. His gesture touched me profoundly. He helped me preserve my memories, but at the same time, he knew he was packing his son out of his life.

I organized a big farewell party at my home. I was living alone at that time. I invited my parents, but they decided not to show up. They did not want to celebrate my leaving. My friends decorated my house. My friends and I drank all night, laughed, and cried. We sang Milton Nascimento's song: *Canção da America* (Song of America).

Canção da America (Song of America)

A friend is something
to keep under seven keys
inside the heart...

So, whatever comes,

Come what may

Any day, friend

I'll meet you again

Any day, friend,

we

will meet.



Amigo é coisa pra se guardar

Debaixo de sete chaves

dentro do coração...

Pois seja o que vier

Venha o que vier

Qualquer dia, amigo

Eu volto a te encontrar

Qualquer dia, amigo

A gente

vai se encontrar.

Later, my friends drove me to the airport, where we kept partying until I boarded a Pan Am flight. I arrived in New York on July 7, 1988. For a moment, I thought I had lost everything I left behind in Brazil. It was a strange feeling.

A new life was about to start.



After arriving in the United States, I achieved tremendous success. In 36 years, I accomplished many of my dreams. I married a wonderful woman and had two wonderful, brilliant sons. I earned an MBA and gradually climbed the executive ladder. My wife and her family, whom I still love, significantly contributed to my professional and personal growth. I became an executive in foreign trade, specializing in the pharmaceutical field, became a licensed U.S. Customs broker agent, and could afford a good life.

My executive work required monthly international trips. After learning to enjoy hiking in 2016, no one in the family, except my youngest son, enjoyed the wild hiking adventures. I started traveling and feeling alone. I started regretting leaving my passion for theater and art behind.

In 2018, I began writing passionately and incorporating my nature photographs. I noticed that this internal drive guided me to where I felt whole. It only required a piece of paper and a pencil. Soon, I started taking writing classes, joined a Brazilian writing group in Boston, New England, and ultimately took it seriously. I am now completing my graduate studies focused

on creative writing in English, and through this, I am meeting and learning from great writers, poets, and teachers.

Writing seemed like an activity I could do from anywhere, and it became one of my passions. I noticed that my writing helped release and organize many feelings and creative ideas I had kept in my heart.

This was an extraordinary outburst that created a new problem. During the summer of 2020, I started arguing with my wife because she wanted to go to the beach and boat with her father, their regular hobby. Due to my extended professional travels, I started enjoying staying home. I had a beautiful garden, and taking care of it was one of my favorite activities besides writing. I started using the weekends to write. I keep forgetting that Summer in New England is not the everyday summer in Brazil.

I tolerated these arguments for a while until one summer day, my wife yelled at me and said, “Are you stupid? You will never be a writer. You are wasting your time! *Luiz Madrid* (my pen name) does not exist!”

After saying all those harsh words, she slammed the door and left for her weekend boat trip with her family. I was distraught but still enjoyed the weekend, which included lots of writing.

I felt a deep pain in my heart, yet I decided to fight for my freedom. It culminated in a divorce after thirty-two years of a wonderful marriage. It was complicated, but I knew it was time to prioritize my freedom and address all my unanswered questions and feelings. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic had

its outbreak. I was afraid that the disease would take my life away. What about my dreams, I wondered.

My former wife and I still talk today, but as friends. I enjoyed every moment I spent with her and her family. She loved to read, but I was never a strong reader. Today, I am becoming a much stronger reader.

Until my divorce, I always felt obligated to support myself and my family. I loved my international trade job, which gave me access to many parts of the world and the opportunity to explore other cultures and languages. I have studied English, Spanish, and French and continue to study Japanese.

In 2024, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. So far, I have successfully navigated through it. It was the first major surgery in my life. Right after surgery, as expected, I began to experience urinary incontinence. *Oh boy, how I disliked having wet diapers or absorbents in my underwear! It was a disaster.*

The incontinence brought all these childhood memories back to the surface—not only the incontinence but also the remembrance of the mixed feelings of pain with bits of pleasure and the insistent curiosity—feelings I am still trying to piece together.

I have not given up on being who I truly am. I know I cannot change the facts about my past, but I can write and rewrite my memories as they were kept.

Time reorganizes these memories, making them more visible. They keep changing places inside memory until they are properly stored. It is constantly rebooting your wires, like a software program.

I have learned to accept duality. It would be easier if humans were only made of material layers; they could measure, replace, or end their parts. We forget that we are also energy. The layers of energy are immeasurable pieces that exist for an undetermined length of time, transcending death.

We cannot control this energetic dimension or bring it to an end. All feelings are energy that remains alive. This energy is cosmic. This is why we cannot control them; we can forcefully compress them in our hearts, but can not plan a date to end them. They exist on their terms, not on the terms we establish, similar to the light of day. It is a complex process.

In essence, humans are made of both matter (which requires food and has a shelf life) and energy (spirit, something cosmic with unknown dimensions). Humans, by nature, are both; we are both naturally dual. These two components are inseparable.

This memoir ends here, but I believe our memories will live indefinitely.