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CE Mesa, ESL Level 7

**Cultivating and Sharing My Culture**

Although I was brought up in an affluent family, living a comfortable life, my parents still taught me not to get anything for granted. They said that something you have today may not be yours tomorrow, and I always tried to keep that in mind. But I did not know that it is also true about culture. While I was growing up, I did not realize how much of the culture around me I was absorbing. I saw the splendid Brazilian celebrations as the most common thing in the world. I took them for granted because I saw them all the time. It was only after I got married and my husband was transferred to Denmark that I realized how unique and special my culture was.

The first thing that struck me in Denmark was that the people there were not as open with strangers as we are in Brazil. They did not talk to others on the bus or in the stores, and you would barely see them smile in the street. Later, I lived in China, and there I realized something else I had taken for granted - language. In China people were eager to communicate, but few spoke the languages I knew, English and Portuguese. Chinese, on the other hand, was too difficult for me to learn in a short time, and language turned out to be the biggest barrier in communication.

After my experiences in Denmark and China, I realized the importance of my culture and I tried my best to integrate Brazilian traditions into my life wherever I lived. In the beginning, when it was just me and my husband, keeping in touch with the Brazilian community gave us many opportunities to celebrate the Brazilian way. After my daughter was born, I also felt a strong desire to teach her the language. I wanted her to understand that even though she has never lived in Brazil, she is Brazilian and Brazilian culture and the Portuguese language are a part of her.

Surprisingly, cultivating my language and culture brought me closer to many people in America. In Brazil, we have “Carnaval,” “Festa Junina”, and exquisite customs for birthdays, Christmas, and the New Year. Nowadays, I celebrate them just as we would in Brazil. I prepare traditional food and decorations and invite friends from all over the world. Everyone is welcome, just like in Brazil. I tell them about our traditions and people seem to enjoy it. It often leads to conversations about their cultures, which helps me connect with others, practice English, and broaden my mind. Furthermore, when I talk about what I know well, I am not afraid that I will say something wrong, which helps me combat awkwardness when speaking in English.

I learned that I do not need to leave my roots behind. I fact, they continue to nourish me as I move to new lands.