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One Of A Kind

From the outside looking in, it all looks so perfect! Just take a moment to think about it. Here is a young man with an incredible family, 4/02 GPA, President of the National Honor Society, a five sport all star athlete, and involved in many community events. This endless energy and passion to achieve the best possible result only provokes those around to admire my accomplishments and to covet the great life I celebrate.

While I live a beautiful life of rich blessings, my road to success was paved with unseen dangers, hideously destructive secrets, and unimaginable tragedy. One would change his/her mind upon knowing the truth of where I came from. A diamond in the rough is an understatement.

Born to Brazilian parents in Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil, poverty and sadness were my companions as a child. Daily beatings and hard child labor had become a normal routine. By the time I reached twelve years of age I had experienced more traumatic events than most would in a lifetime. As a young child, I lost my twin brother to pneumonia, my oldest sister was removed from our home due to sexual abuse, my oldest brother contracted AIDS, and my mother was killed in a car accident. What are five young children to do when everything around them fails and those they turn to reject them? With no perspective future and no one to guide me, it became easy to turn to petty thievery and fighting, deepening the seeds of rebellion and hate. My world was already bad enough but my suffering was not over. My biological dad came back into our lives to enslave us again in a life of abuse and shame. My oldest brother was the handsome perfect son; my other brother was called the "smart" son, while I was left to be the "burro" or "stupid" son. Yes, learning was difficult and understanding my work took more time than the others needed. My heart was full of anger and fear and there was nothing to look forward to. I so clearly remember my dad being drunk and making every attempt to kill us in order to end our suffering and his too. After losing his mind, he waited for us to sleep and set our house on fire to burn us alive. Thankfully, my brother woke up in time to save our lives. Out of fear, my dad ran from the police and abandoned his kids. Our extended family rejected us, leaving us to be raised in the streets.

Little did we know our oldest brother would take us to the home of an American missionary family on the mountain where we would find refuge! It seemed as if I had no chance of "real" social

encounters. My abusive childhood contributed nothing less than fear and intimidation making it next to impossible to face society. My isolated life and lack of social interaction caused me to appear “socially retarded.” Now I was faced with a new challenge, learning and growing in my new family. Though a whirlwind of confusion surrounded our lives, we were incredibly impacted by our new social environment. My new parents were the “American missionaries.” They were known by everyone and received visitors from all over the world. This once shy and non-social boy was being forced to interact with people from all over the world. What a complete opposite lifestyle I had been introduced to.

My new dad, a complete passionate and selfless individual who left his country as a missionary to arrive in Brazil with a wife, five children, and only three hundred dollars in his pocket, became my hero as he spent most of his time building my confidence by teaching me invaluable principles and people skills. Judged by those who surrounded him as unrealistic and insane to adopt five children at once, adding up to a total of ten, his deep love let no barriers stop his hope for our lives. A foundation of strength and confidence was being built through his love and trust being invested in me. Slowly, I began to understand what my new dad was teaching and because of his endless fight, amazingly friendships became easier to develop and life had a new meaning to me. I still had quite a ways to go, but I certainly was on the road to success. The greatest challenge was yet awaiting me as I immigrated to the USA. I arrived not speaking any English and thus decided to repeat my freshman year. My dad taught me to love every subject I studied and treat each experience as a treasure. He refused to let me take the “easy” courses, rather he saw my potential and chose to help me explore everything I could and make the best of my opportunities. Were there scares from my past? Yes, but my dad’s effort and dedication were infinite and he refused to allow my past to determine my future. He was a light in the middle of darkness and a star in a community of lacking stars.

Those who know me then would not recognize me now and those who know me now would not recognize me then. My past “self,” the wounded and introverted “burro,” is now blessed to be the valedictorian of his class, the appointed chairman of education on the Inaugural Indiana Legislative Youth Advisory Council, speaks English, Portuguese, and Spanish fluently, and was awarded West Point’s highest honor during their summer camp as the outstanding leader of character.

My heart is full of gratitude because of the love and respect that my daddy invested in me. Nobody would ever imagine that one risky decision made by him five years ago and a tenacious desire in

me to overcome every obstacle would dramatically change my life in such a profound manner. You see, before one is ready to give me praise and glory because of where I stand now, it behooves them to know the sacrifice and endless fight it took for this hero to get where I am today.