

### Georgetown Says Kisses To Brazil

In a few days, Mariana goes back to Brazil. It's impossible. A whole school year has quickly come and gone yet, our lives are forever changed.

I remember our ride home from Austin-Bergstrom airport—anxious and uncertain about how this was going to work. We never had a foreign exchange student before. I felt like I was on a first date. Am I talking too much? Did I just insult her by saying *si* instead of *yes*? Will she and my daughter get along? What if she doesn't like my cooking?

A few miles northbound on IH 35 and we began to breathe again.

"They have a Pizza Hut in Brazil? A Sam's Club too? Wow, cool." Whew, common ground! I guess that's human nature--searching for ways to connect. It's like meeting another newcomer at church or the Mary Kay convention. We couldn't be *that* far apart culturally, I thought, if both Georgetown and Sao Paulo have a Sam's Club.

But Sao Paulo is no Georgetown. For example, here when you run into someone at, let's say Target, you shake hands or give a hug if you really like the person. In Sao Paulo, you touch cheeks while kissing the air. Handshakes are commonly the formal greeting between businesspersons.

In Georgetown, we say "bye bye" or "talk to your later" at the end of a phone conversation. In Brazil, phone calls are always sealed with "beijo" (pronounced, "*bay zhou*") which means, "kisses".

I've also learned how much we take things for granted in Georgetown, like peanut butter and school sports. In Sao Paulo, there's no peanut butter and organized sports are available through private "for pay" clubs only.

Differences aside, Georgetown has influenced Mariana in indelible ways. "Are ya'll going swimming", and "see ya'll later" have become staples of her vocabulary. Texan with a Portuguese twang is quite charming.

It's also amazing how she's been influenced by my daughter. I can't wait to hear how her friends in Sao Paulo react when she says, "you're goin' down"! My daughter has gained a forever sister too.

Despite the differences between our cultures, we have one thing in common—our love for Mariana. As I watch her pack, it seems only weeks ago she was unpacking the very bags that had travelled with her to her new life in Georgetown. Back then, I wondered if her bedroom was big enough. Now, I wonder if my heart is big enough to see it empty.

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I'll miss her good-natured sense of humor, the funny polka –hop-- skip-trot thing she used to do through the house. I'll miss her grand smile which brought the sunrise over Brazil right into my living room. I'll miss her addiction to scrap booking and all the paper shreds she left on the kitchen table. I'll miss her sweet surprises like mopping the kitchen floor for me and baking something that looked like a cake.

The love of another human being is so perplexing. It fills your heart in unspeakable ways yet breaks it so brutally at the thought of goodbye.

I walk around the house, trying hard not to notice the emptying shelves and closets—trying to keep my mind on other things like this article and the beautiful blue Georgetown sky. But that's just it. If you invite someone into your home and your life and you love them like they're your own, they become your own-- an inseparable part of everything you shared.

Would I do it again despite the agony of goodbye? Absolutely. Will she forever be a part of the Jones family? You bet!

Mariana, until you come back, "beijo", we love you with hugs and kisses!

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Several foreign exchange companies are available. The Joneses used Center For Cultural Interchange. Contact Jayne Allen 512-215-9720.

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