

Passport, Birth Certificate and Destiny.

By Jennifer Cabral

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"Department of State Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States of America" (A) that is how this document is titled. This document had a direct effect on my insertion into this country not as a mere legal alien but as a full-citizen with all its responsibilities and entitlements. How my family has been part of different historic migration waves and was allowed to participate in American society will be exposed below as I detailed clauses contained in this document which describes dates and location that will define my family lineage and roles in society. I was surprised at how much of my family's history and that of my own were defined, classified, described and categorized in one single document. On each clause I found a piece of history revealed and another cloaked. Data might be evidence of an event's occurrence but does not describe it. Each date contained marked turning points on a family member's life and of my own. Moreover, the context that each date encapsulates signifies a moment in history with political, social and economic timelines that marked the social roles and class, along with beliefs and identities we carried as individuals. The impositions and limitations we experienced as part of a social group, a layer of society, or a race can also be understood from the timelines this document presents.

An original copy of my Report of Birth Abroad was given to me by my father when I moved to the United States in 2001. I remember him opening the valise where he kept his most valued documents, insurance policies, retirement accounts, property titles, cemetery plots and death certificates of my ancestors. This sheet of paper was amongst them. This signified how estimated this document was for my father. Now in the context of migration crisis that is exploding all over the world I understand the value of such documents as I witness so many individuals struggling to legalize their status as citizens, aliens or nationals of a country. I was 27 years old at the time and had no idea of the impact such documents would have in my adult life. Ten years earlier, my younger and only sister had already experienced this rite of passage, when my father handed her own copy of a similar document. She was emancipated and allowed to travel abroad without

a guardian and would never again reside in Brazil. America became her permanent residence ever since.

After analyzing this document I didn't expect it to reveal so much about myself and my family, the social structures we are inserted in, the cultural history we experienced and the political and economic background that shaped our status in society. It lists typical information you would expect in a document of this type such as, the name of the child in full: Jennifer Marie Cabral da Silva, my given name. It lists my date of birth: February 5th, 1974; and the hospital where I was born: "Maternidade C.F. Matarazzo, São Paulo, S.P. Brazil.". It also indicates the DATE AND PLACE OF REPORT: April 17th, 1974. São Paulo, S.P. Brazil exactly 71 days after my birth. Since I was only two-months-old my mother probably had her hands full dealing with her first moments of motherhood. So, I've always assumed my father was the one who took charge of filling this documentation in order to officialize my status as a citizen of the United States at the American Embassy in São Paulo, Brazil. But when I looked at this document it was my mother's handwriting I found on the bottom of the page. She inherited my grandmother's writing style, a penmanship I always hoped to acquire since I was a kid, but all my attempts to have a signature as beautiful as my mother's have been in vain. Her signature on this document probably signifies that I was present during the transferring of documents and the signing of papers that made me an American citizen. She was probably carrying me. A baptism of sorts. Further investigation, resurfaced another document acquired at the same American Embassy in São Paulo and signed by the same American Consul: my mother's U.S. passport (B). On this document my presence was definitely required. My mother held me on her lap as she exhibited a specimen as evidence of its existence. In this document I am defined as: Minor. It only includes my first name: Jennifer. The elimination of my last name excludes paternal information. I am for sure daughter of my mother but no indication is made of who the father is.

Interestingly the "Report of Citizens born abroad" has specific columns for Father and Mother. The design and layout of information is particularly interesting to me. The three columns use wisely the space available and allows for a large amount of data to be collected succinctly. And in the case of this document, unlike the passport, the father must be present and their union must be legitimized. It requires DATE AND PLACE OF

PRESENT MARRIAGE: December 20th, 1969 in Jackson Heights, NY. But, this clause made me question: what if my mom was a single mother? Would this question just be left unanswered? To me this clause is a testament to the conventions of traditional rules involving sex and procreation - the presumption that a woman with child must be married.

This document also lists the residences of my parents as a young couple both in the U.S. and in Brazil. And I couldn't resist typing in both addresses on Google maps. To view their apartments and the disparity of the street life in both hemispheres was a good representation of the different societies my families had to transition to and from.

42-22 Ketchum Street, Elmhurst New York, N.Y. 11373 (<https://www.google.com/maps/place/42-22+Ketcham+St,+Flushing,+NY+11373/@40.7448428,-73.8834106,3a,75y,219.56h,90t/data=!3m4!1e1!3m2!1sjsPlfCc8pWnkvBoUND4GRQ!2eo!4m2!3m1!1sox89c25fabf32e67ff:ox4a78c744a48c7086>)

Rua Senador Flaquer 161, apt 52, Santo André, São Paulo, Brasil
(<https://www.google.com/maps/place/R.+Sen.+Fláquer,+161+-+Centro,+Santo+André+-+SP,+09010-160,+Brazil/@-23.660492,-46.5259163,3a,75y,6.61h,90t/data=!3m4!1e1!3m2!1sRsuZbPAQG-rcLdzgsQ2Zlg!2eo!4m2!3m1!1sox94ce4288803035fb:oxd3bbe00018e947d9>)

A non-political or social information, but one that is a mere curiosity is the exact time of birth that is listed. Time of death is fundamental for life insurance purposes, investigations and accidental deaths. But, I rather be preoccupied with my time of birth than the unpredictable and hopefully remote time of my death. I was told I was born on a Tuesday during a Full moon, exactly at 4:00 AM in the morning. But this document changes everything. At least, astrologically. I believed I was an Aquarius Sun, with Capricorn Ascendant. But this document places my birth at exactly 4:50 AM and I am now Aquarius Sun, with Aquarius Rising. My personality and destiny will now be interpreted differently.

Another signature is present on the document in addition to my mother's, that of an American Consul in Brazil, Mr. Donald B. Wallace, Jr. His signature is present on a

section of the document that must be completed by CONSULAR OFFICER, NOTARY PUBLIC OR OTHER PERSON QUALIFIED TO ADMINISTER OATH. This confirms the formality and almost ritualistic process involved in becoming a citizen of the United States of America. According to the website of the U.S. Citizenship and immigration: *“Throughout our nation's history, foreign-born men and women have come to the United States, taken the Oath of Allegiance to become naturalized citizens, and contributed greatly to their new communities and country. The Oath of Allegiance has led to American citizenship for more than 220 years.”*

Although as a two-month-old baby I did not take the oath of allegiance, (my parents probably did it for me), I do remember as a 15-year-old visiting the same embassy in order to acquire a new passport and with my right hand risen I had to read a long text in my broken English: *"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God."*

I was surprised to read once again such an oath and I wonder how such allegiance might be difficult to some individuals. In particular the statement: *“That I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same”*. In the midst of one of the largest migrant crises in modern history how would a Hindu, Jewish or Buddhist family feel about it? What about those fleeing Syria seeking asylum? How would muslims feel about such a statement? Doesn't “true faith” implies Christendom and excludes all other religions?

Another responsibility one must commit to by oath is *“I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law”*. But I was glad to learn that a waiver is allowed and a modified oath of allegiance may be used in the naturalization process when an individual based on religious belief or a conscientious objection refuses to serve

in the military. This role of citizenship was fulfilled by my father as this report of birth abroad document confirms under the clause: FATHER - PRECISE PERIODS ABROAD IN U.S. ARMED FORCES: November 1964 to February 1966 - US Armed Forces in Germany. But what this document doesn't reveal is how the Vietnam war was already escalating. During my dad's last year of service in 1966, 3.755 American Soldiers would be killed in action. Luckily my father was stationed in Germany. From where he was stationed, he protected the Berlin Wall and monitored Soviet activity in the region but was away from direct combat. He was also invited to join the US Armed Forces Soccer team and traveled throughout Europe attending friendly games against foreign troops. He had been a soccer player in a minor league in Brazil and his sportsmanship was noticed by the military. This specific clause represents a historical period in which the tensions with Communist countries was high. And at the same time the existence of such friendly games are reminiscent of another historical event: WWII. The division of Armed Forces Sports (AFS) was an initiative created in the midst of post-second-world-war Europe: *"Founded on 18 February 1948, CISM is one of the largest multidisciplinary organizations in the world. Using the motto "Friendship through Sport", CISM uses the playing field to unite Armed Forces of nations that may have previously confronted each other because of political and ideological differences. The ultimate goal is to contribute to world peace by uniting armed forces through sports as well as promote solidarity and technical assistance within nations."* It is so intriguing to me how these historical moments: WWII and the Cold War were determined by my father's experience during his military service.

Another information one of the clauses required was my mother's PRECISE PERIODS OF PHYSICAL PRESENCE IN THE UNITED STATES: August 1946 to May 26th, 1973. What the summer of 1946 on this document doesn't reveal is the hardship my grandfather experienced when he arrived in the New York Harbor. Mr. Cabral was accompanied by his eight-month-pregnant-wife and nine-year-old-daughter. To relocate his family to the U.S. my grandfather left behind a position as head-electrician at one of Brazil's main power companies and sold all his possessions: including a nice home with all its furnishing and belongings. For six months, They would live in a spare room at a home in Staten Island before being able to find affordable housing. With the head of the family not being able to find a steady job in post-second-world-war Manhattan it exhausted all their savings. And even after his children went to school Mr. Cabral

refused to allow his wife to join the workforce. My Grandmother was a very independent woman, and as a single woman worked as a secretary in the Office of Justice in 1920's Rio de Janeiro. But the machismo prevalent in his native country impeded him to allow his partner to work. Even in post-second-world-war women irreversibly joined the workforce.

One wonders, what would make an established 45-year-old to leave his native country and board his family on a ship to a foreign land? As a young man, my grandfather had lived in New York and was mesmerized by this city and the opportunities it offered. But the New York he saw in the summer of 1926 was very different from the one he was now experiencing 20 years later. He used to say he arrived in New York on the day of Rudolf Valentino's funeral: August 23rd, 1926. The glamor and the pompous event starstruck the 26-year-old Cabral. Eventually he landed a job at the United Nations as its in-house electric-engineer, a position he would hold until his retirement. This allowed him to provide a simple but comfortable life for his family throughout the 50's and 60's. Ironically, he would be buried by the same funeral parlor Frank Campbell Funeral Home where he witnessed the Hollywood star's funeral on February, 17th, 1967.

As I observed the bottom right corner of this document it lists FORM FS-240 and to my surprise the same form is still in use today. But as stated on the official website: "*A more secure Consular Report of Birth Abroad of a U.S. Citizen was introduced in January 2011. This new CRBA has been updated with a variety of state of the art security features, and is printed centrally in the United States. U.S. embassies and consulates no longer print CRBAs locally, but you still must apply there. The central production was initiated to ensure uniform quality and reduce vulnerability to fraud. The previous version of the CRBA continues to be valid proof of U.S. citizenship.*" I thereby wondered if my copy of this document was still valid and for my relief the website clearly states: "*All previously issued FS-240 and DS-1350 documents are still valid for proof of identity, citizenship, and other legal purposes.*"

This document clearly has a broader meaning to me than the Conventional definition offered by Michael Buchkland's "Documentality beyond Documents". According to the Material View: *This sees documents as graphic records, usually of textual form*

inscribed or displayed on a flat surface (clay tablet, paper, microfilm, computer screen) that are material, local, and generally, transportable. These objects are made as document.”

Having these documents in my hands as I crossed into the border of the United States meant I could be in this country legally. It not only gave me the freedom to roam this land without the fear of arrest and deportation but it also gave me the right to legally work in this country with the protections offered by the Department of Labor. This meant I received at least the minimum wage for my services, that I was provided with health insurance, and was protected under Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requirements. Basic rights that are inexistent to those who live illegally in this country. This document also meant, as a Citizen of the United States I was obliged to pay taxes, serve in the military if required, support and defend the Constitution and gave me the right to vote. I hope not to take for granted any of the rights bestowed upon me, and I execute my duties as a Citizen to the best of my ability.

Appendix:

(A). Birth Certificate

(B). Passport

→ **WARNING:** ALTERATION, ADDITION OR MUTILATION OF ENTRIES IS PROHIBITED.
ANY UNOFFICIAL CHANGE WILL RENDER THIS PASSPORT INVALID.

NAME GLADYS CABRAL DA SILVA		
BIRTH DATE AUG. 17, 1937		BIRTHPLACE BRAZIL
HEIGHT 5 FEET 5 INCHES	HAIR BROWN	EYES BROWN
WIFE X X X		ISSUE DATE JUNE 5, 1974
MINORS JENNIFER		EXPIRATION DATE JUNE 4, 1979
New application		JUN 26 1993 <i>Gladys Cabral da Silva</i> SIGNATURE OF BEARER

→ **IMPORTANT:** THIS PASSPORT IS NOT VALID UNTIL SIGNED BY THE BEARER. PERSONS INCLUDED HEREIN MAY NOT USE THIS PASSPORT FOR TRAVEL UNLESS ACCOMPANIED BY THE BEARER.

Gladys Cabral da Silva

**U. S. REGISTRATION
NEW YORK, N. Y. 820
JUN 29 1974**

ADMITTED
UNTIL **CLASS**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



References:

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Master of Information - School of Communication and Information
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

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