

The Cemetery

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When I was seven, my family moved to a new house. For the first time we were going to our own house. We lived in a small town in the countryside of Brazil, named Pinhal. It is the type of town where everybody knows each other and, worse than this, everybody knows and cares about others' life, in a bad meaning. Our new house was a little far and we did not have car, so we had to walk a lot every day. But it was not a problem at all. As I said, we were going to our own house and this was the most important thing.

However there was another problem in this house which should also let us ashamed, more than the distance. The house was in a hill behind the cemetery of the city. Basically nobody used to live in that place when we moved there. The cemetery was almost at the end, in the exit of the town. However our house was even behind of it, literally behind the cemetery. The front door of our house was exactly in front of the back gate of the cemetery.

We are five siblings in my family and I'm the youngest one. In that time, my older siblings had to leave home early to go to their jobs, as well as my parents did. However, my routine was very simple; I just had to go to my school, which was not so far, maybe five minutes by walking. It was a poor public school, probably the poorest school of the city, which were frequented by many children that came from some farms or from some poor families that also lived in a neighborhood close to the cemetery.

The rest of my days I spent there around my house, or alone, or playing with some other few children, as the son of the mason that worked building other houses in our block. You can believe me: many many times I used to play inside of the cemetery. In that time, I guess I knew

all graves of the cemetery or almost all of them. I can say that there it was my playground. I remember clearly my favorite one. It was the grave of one Baron who used to live in my town long ago, Motta Paes' Baron. He was famous because he was the first farmer to plant coffee in my city. His grave was huge. The most interesting for me and my few friends was that we could go inside of it. There was a small room, basically a small chapel. It was a nice place to go when we played 'hide and seek', because some of the children were afraid to go there to look for us.

In the main aisle, which finishes in front of the front-door of our house, it is the grave of my grandfather, my mother's father. From the front-door of our house we could see that common blue grave with a bed headboard serving as grave headboard – if this makes sense – where the names of my grandpa and his father were placed with their birth and death dates, and just this, no epigraph or inspiring quotation, just the names and the dates. I remember clearly those small signs with their names: my grandpa who had the same name of one of my siblings, Ezequiel, and my grand grandfather, Luis. I never knew where my grand grandmother was and why she was not together with his husband and his son. Maybe she was, but for some reason her name was not there, just her body. There was also buried there, in the same grave, one son of my uncle, who died shortly after he was born. I never had that person as one cousin; he was just the son of my uncle, some distant person who lived less than one day. For some unclear reason his name was not there as well, together with my grandfather's and the Nono's name. Nono was as my mom used to refer to his grandpa.

I remember that I looked at that grave and I saw that there were clearly spots to four people, not just for three. In my practical child's mind, there was no reason to have an unused spot. So, I always wondered who the fourth person who was secretly buried in that fourth spot

was. In my mind, if there was nobody there, the spot should be opened, and it was not. I also wondered which one of them was buried in which one of those spots. However I never asked my mother, I guess it was a not good memory to her and I was supposed to respect her memories and feelings.

Having my grandfather's grave just in front of me every single day was not a big deal to me. He had died some years before I was born. So, I have to confess that he was just one name in the history, just a character in some family's stories.

Probably for my age and for my familiarity with that place I used to do something different of my siblings and my parents. Everyone in my family used to get around passing out of the cemetery when they went to some place, but not me. I used to cross the cemetery to safe distance and time. For long time my siblings made fun with me for this reason. Sometimes the cemetery was closed, so I had to jump the gates to be able to cross the cemetery. One day my sister saw me doing this and she got mad at me. She told me I could kill somebody with heart attack when I was jumping from inside to the sidewalk. She said that if they were passing in the street and saw me jumping over the wall or the gates of the cemetery, they could think I was a ghost. I just thought this idea was funny. Consequently, she just made me doing this even more, with more pleasure, as something which was forbidden. It never happened that someone get scared when I jumped over the cemetery wall, but I believe that it had been really funny if this had happened.

Nowadays when I remember these facts and I see what happened with me, how I left home when I was just seventeen to live far, and many decision I took in my live, I remember those days crossing the cemetery, playing there, treating my grandfather's grave as something

usual and common, jumping over the gates and the wall of the cemetery with no fear at all, and I think that all this was meaningful.

Maybe in that time, with such experiences during my childhood, I learned to pass between the deaths, leaving them behind and following my way, with no fear, with no embarrassment, just going and keeping my way. If someone gets scared or frightened for what I'm doing, it's not my business; I'm not doing anything to amaze or to scare anybody. I just think their reactions are funny, but I understand them: they never crossed a cemetery.