



# Sara Quintal

This is Naomi Slipp. I'm here recording a story for Common Ground.

My name is Sarah da Silva Quintel and I am a first generation Azorean American born and raised in New Bedford. My story really starts with my parents who were born in the Azores, my mom on the island of Pico, my dad on the island of Faial. They met in high school, because at that time, Pico didn't have a high school, and my mom was the youngest of 11 kids, so she had to go to high school on the island of Faial, which is where she met my dad. They got married, moved to the island of Terceira, and that's where my three older brothers were born. In the '60s, they immigrated here to the U.S., the reasons why they immigrated, still a little unclear in my mind, but they both had successful jobs in the Azores. My mom was a teacher and my dad worked first for the Portuguese Air Force and then he was a civilian for the American Air Force on Lajes Air Force Base.

They both were doing very well, but that was also the time of Salazar and things were rather tense, from what I understand from my father, regarding if you didn't fall into order and praise Salazar, essentially, your life was made more difficult. I think that tension is certainly what drew him to want to bring his family here and the desire for more opportunities for their kids. Ultimately they came here to New Bedford with sponsorship from my mom's sister Algha, and Algha came here because she came under the [inaudible 00:01:59], she and her husband at the time lived on the island of Faial, during the [inaudible 00:02:04] explosion and their home got severely impacted, so they came and immigrated, and once they settled here, they sponsored my parents and three older brothers.

Once they arrived, my father ended up getting a job at Continental Screw Company because he had an electrical background, preparing jet planes was primarily what he did back there. My mom, with her teaching background, ultimately basically had to get some additional certification and ultimately started teaching here in the New Bedford school system. Then in the '70s, along came my sister and I, and so it was a family of five, growing up in the north end of the city. In 1984 my dad, at the time, somehow he transitions from repairing jet planes, to doing electrical work at Continental Screw, to repairing organs, of all things, because apparently organs are almost as complicated or just about as complicated as jet planes, but there were very few people in New England that repaired organs, but there was a job opportunity for that and he started doing that a few years prior.

Then in order to do that, he traveled all over New England doing service calls, which was just too much with five kids at home. He decided to open up a music store and that was called The Music Center in the north end of New Bedford on Bellville Avenue. When I was four years old, 1984, the store had just opened and he pulls me aside one day, he says, Sarah today, you're going to have your first organ lesson. Now as a four year old, playing the organ was not exactly at the top of my want to do list, but nonetheless, it was something I had to do. I hated practicing, hated, hated, hated, practicing, but somehow I still had to do lessons every week, and I took music lessons all the way until I went to college.

I always hated practicing, and during that time period, I transitioned from organ, to a little bit of voice, into piano, and I can still only play probably three songs by memory. During that process, I basically grew up in my dad's music store shop, which lasted for many, many years until he retired in the early two thousands. We became a part of the music community through that, in the city, and my mom continued to stay working in the New Bedford Public School system as a bilingual special needs teacher. For most of her career, she was at Roosevelt, and she also taught Portuguese School. For her, her Portuguese culture was extremely important and there's a pretty big age gap between me and the rest of my siblings. There's a span of 16 years between us from oldest to youngest, and six years between my sister and I.

While my older siblings were off doing their own thing, and driving cars, and all of that, I spent a lot more time with my mom getting carted around, doing everything that she wanted to do. She very much



continued to promote her Azorean heritage and culture here. On the weekends, when she wasn't working, we would go and do parades associated with Portuguese culture, and we would go and visit cousins and aunts and so forth in the nursing homes or other family members, many of whom only spoke Portuguese. With my parents, both working full time, I was either getting essentially babysat at my father's store or at the house of my two aunts. Two of my mom's sisters immigrated here a few years after my parents did, Ishdella, and Uzelda. Now, they never got married, never had children of their own, they always lived together, were essentially inseparable, and they basically helped raise everyone else's kids, including myself.

Growing up, I often felt like I had three mothers, but it also means I grew up bilingual, because my aunts didn't speak any English. They ultimately did get their green cards and citizenship, they could understand a few words of English here and there, but they were definitely primarily Portuguese speaking. I learned both growing up and I feel very, very fortunate to have been able to grow up speaking both English and Portuguese. I feel like, among all of our siblings, I definitely held to my cultural upbringing the strongest, and definitely feel more pride in it. Maybe that was something having to do with my mom dragging me around everywhere and just completely immersing me in the importance of knowing where you come from, but yet appreciating all the opportunities here, and really becoming part of both communities, but certainly the Azorean community and continuing to learn my history and culture.

She worked for the Portuguese school, in which a few days a week, at night after she did her regular teaching job, she would go and teach sixth graders about their Portuguese history and culture. It used to be called the Portuguese School United for Education, now it's called Discovery Language Academy, many years later. For years and years, I would attend the events for that, but she never made me go, which my dad made me take those organ lessons when he opened the store, but mom never made me go to Portuguese school.

Her rationale was, she's hearing it all at home. I never really learned to read or write Portuguese until I went to high school, and at New Bedford High, they had a great program for native speakers. There was the regular Portuguese classes that you could take as a language, but they also had Portuguese for native speakers, which a lot of kids in New Bedford fell into that category, where you learned how to speak it at home, maybe you learned more of the slang version or a lot of kids, their parents primarily still only spoke Portuguese, because they're more recent immigrants. Nonetheless, many had not learned how to formally read and write. That's where I learned that skill, and things started to finally click when I got to see the grammar associated with it.

When I went away to college, I really missed my culture piece. Actually, I went to college in Bristol, Rhode Island at Roger Williams, and then I went to University of Rhode Island for my master's work, and then I moved to Connecticut and New York and worked there for about eight years. At that time I was the sibling farthest from home, and I missed home, but I never thought in a million years that I would ever move back. I really wanted a career that, first and foremost, I had my heart set on really making something of myself career wise. I always loved school, from the time that I was in fourth grade, I knew what I wanted to do, which is really marine biology. I went to Sea Lab in the south end of New Bedford and loved everything about ocean science, marine science. That's what I went for my undergraduate degree for, was marine biology and chemistry minor. Then when I had the option to go to grad school, I was like, well, I better make myself a little more marketable too and learn the other side of it. I really love plants as well, so I ended up going for wetlands ecology and got more of the fresh water background and watershed science.

When I was done with that degree, I very quickly got a job with environmental consulting and was doing that in the New York tri-state area. After a few years, I had gotten married and my husband and I really knew that it was time to get out of the New York area, it was time for something else. At that point we started thinking about where else we would go, where else we wanted to live. We basically looked throughout all of New England and I'm like, okay, this looks good, I do this, I do this, I do this. Then it was about waiting for the right job opportunities to pop up, and lo and behold, there was a job opportunity that came up here in the city of New Bedford. Again, I never really thought that I would ever move back to New Bedford, it just wasn't something I envisioned myself doing. I wanted to explore the world and live anywhere else for new experiences.



The job came up at a time when I was looking to move, pretty much anywhere but New York, and my parents were starting to get sick as well. My mom had Alzheimer's disease, my dad was in the middle of a pretty major cancer diagnosis and needed to get a major operation, while he was care taking for my mom, and the youngest of five kids who had been living the farthest for over 10 years, that I had been out of the house, I felt that guilt as well. There were a lot of things pulling me back in this direction, and the job was really a great fit, as the restoration ecologist for Buzzards Bay Coalition. I took it and it was the best thing that I had ever done. At that point in time, it was the right choice, and 10 years later, here I am, I'm still working with Buzzards Bay Coalition.

I'm also very much still very proud of my Azorean heritage, so much so that as soon as I moved back to New Bedford, I went to the Portuguese Console and I got my dual citizenship. I now have my Portuguese and my American citizenship. I really missed sailing, which I had done a lot of all through college, and so I became involved in an organization that two of my cousins were involved in, where they got to race Azorean whale boats every week during the summer. That just sounded amazing to me, so I quickly got involved once I moved back, helping out my parents, and working, and finally being able to get back on a boat after work. I loved it so much that I quickly joined the board, and then climbed the ranks and became president of Azorean Maritime Heritage Society, in 2016. My mom passed away right at the very end of 2015, it was just before Christmas, and I still get emotional about it, but I felt like I had been sort of training for that moment all my life.

She had instilled in me the importance of remembering my heritage, and when I became president, that's exactly what I felt like my time had come to do, is to make sure that that piece of our culture never got forgotten and continued to stay vibrant in the community. Since 2016, I have been one of the strongest advocates for preserving Azorean heritage here in the city, and I love it. I'm raising my now two year old son, I'm teaching him Portuguese words here and there. He's learning faster than my husband is, who's not Portuguese. My heart and sole are in it, in making sure that my mother's legacy, and my family's legacy, of immigrants here in New Bedford is never forgotten and that the future generations continue to know its importance, and thrive on that cultural identity.