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I remember when we weren't Americans. While my siblings and I had been born in California, “os Americanos” were other people, the English-speaking population that surrounded our Azorean family. Even after I, the eldest, enrolled in school and began speaking English in addition to Portuguese, we still referred to the English-speaking majority as “os Americanos.”

It wasn't until a few years later, after my Terceira-born father took out U.S. citizenship papers, that it began to feel awkward to make a distinction between ourselves and “Americanos.” Our Portuguese identities began to fade as my siblings and I progressed through school and became thoroughly assimilated into the dominant culture. We began to use English with each other—even in personal conversations away from school.

Public schools in California during the sixties became increasingly concerned with bilingual education. However, this was always understood to mean a combination of English and Spanish. We Portuguese-speaking kids were left out. We would just shrug our shoulders; it didn't pertain to us. If anything, it puzzled us. We had learned English without formal assistance in school, so why couldn't everyone else? In reality, matters were not that simple. Some of my cousins were held back in elementary school because they had difficulty adjusting to the English-based environment. Some bilingual assistance in class might have made a positive difference, but it did not officially exist. (And unofficial assistance ended when I was caught whispering answers to my cousin and our teacher separated us.)

My Barcellos grandparents had fourteen grandchildren, all of whom were acquainted with Portuguese. My *Avó*, who lived into her eighties, for most of her life had all of her descendants within a thirty-mile radius of her home. (When I went away to college, I was for several years the sole exception to this rule.) As the grandchildren married and moved—some of them out of state—the resulting great-grandchildren tended to be monolingual. However, one of my brothers married a girl of Azorean descent and his daughters are all bilingual. They're the exception.

My other brother married a girl who did not share his ethnic background; their children know essentially no Portuguese. The same is true of my sister's children, who picked up very little of their mother's original language because she could not use it with her English-speaking husband. I daresay my brother-in-law actually knows more than his children, since he was immersed in our family's Portuguese-speaking environment during his brave courtship of my sister, in the days before our grandparents passed away and English took over as our common tongue. He probably suspected that a lot of the undecipherable conversation going on about him concerned the English-only intruder in our midst (and he would have been correct). True love finds a way.

Avó lived long enough to see her first great-grandchildren. Her eldest great-granddaughter today lives with her husband and four sons on the Barcellos dairy farm,

less than a mile from her great-grandmother's old house (now remodeled into the residence of her parents, the current owners and operators of the family dairy farm). She routinely speaks to the boys in Portuguese, imparting to them a portion of their heritage and preserving what is elsewhere being lost. My grandmother never met these boys, but *Avó* would have smiled with delight to hear her great-great-grandsons speak in her native tongue. I can hear her voice in my mind's ear: "*Credo! Beleza!*"

Anthony Barcellos is professor of mathematics and chair of his department at American River College in Sacramento, California. He grew up on his grandfather's dairy farm, speaking Portuguese as his first language; he wishes that he retained a greater facility in it. His novel *Land of Milk and Money* is based on his experiences as a dairy-farm boy in Central California and is scheduled for fall 2012 publication by Tagus Press and the Center for Portuguese Studies and Culture at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth.