

Smelly Sandals

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It's midnight on a Friday. My home is dark and both my homestay mothers are asleep. As I lie down and close my eyes, my phone buzzes. It's a text message from a Brazilian friend I recently made that reads, "Come to a small get-together at my apartment. My friends and I just got back from a concert are making food."

Shoot! I want to go because it's a good opportunity meet Brazilians around my age, but I have a 6am excursion in the morning.

Should I stay or go? Stay: You'll be dead tired in the morning. Go: You are only in Brazil for seven weeks. Stay: You have no way to tell your mom's that you are going out. Go: You are only in Brazil for seven weeks. Stay: You should be responsible to make a good impression on your homestay family. Go: You are only in Brazil for seven weeks. Stay: You will be caught if you try to leave because you don't have "badass" bone in your body. Go: You are only in Brazil for seven weeks.

I respond, "Give me 15 minutes!"

I cautiously slip out from my bed and slowly change my clothes. The upstairs portion of the house has wood floors, so I might as well be in a field of landmines. Every time the floor creaks, my heart stops. I quickly freeze for a moment and desperately listen for movement other than my own. After a few seconds, I continue to get dressed and make my way downstairs.

My heart and mind are racing – I have never snuck out of anywhere in my life. What was I doing? I felt like I was betraying the trust I built with my homestay mothers. But on the other hand, I felt like I was making the most of time.

I made it downstairs and chose to leave through the back because the front door is too squeaky. I have two doors standing in the way between the backyard and me. I arrive to the first door.

There is a key sticking out of it and I freak out. What should I do? If I leave the door open with the key inside and my moms wake up, they could be upset that I left the door open (on top of sneaking out). But, what if they need to escape because of a fire and can't (because, of course, me sneaking out of the house exponentially augments the likelihood of a house fire) since I took the key and locked the door? I decided to take the key with me and lock the door and pray to baby Jesus that they will not wake up or need to leave the house in the middle of the night.

I get to the second door and swear this key was soldered in because it took about five minutes to get it out of the door. I was anxious to get outside and worried that I was making too much noise. At any moment, I felt like the lights inside of the pitch-black home were going to turn on.

I make it past both doors and I am outside. With both doors locked and the keys in my pocket, I confidently I soak in my triumph. This is a big deal, I felt pretty cool.

As I breathe in the smell of relief and freedom, an unsettling feelings sinks in. I immediately realize that there is no exit through the backyard. I am stuck. Stuck! I incredulously (and carefully) stumble around the pitch-black backyard furiously attempting to find a hole in the fence, or a secret path that would take me to the front, but I find nothing. Nothing! In disbelief, I slowly make my way towards the back door disappointed and more determined than ever.

“I’ve got to go outside through the front door, I can’t give up now”, I thought to myself.

Just as I settled on this idea, a pungent, yet familiar smell came over me. I remember that my homestay mothers have cats that live outside. To my dismay, I stepped in fresh cat droppings. My sandals were completely covered in them.

“Shoot!” I thought, as I vigorously scrubbed the bottoms of against the grass.

The fresh brown stuff infiltrated the crevices of my sandal and I felt doomed. Not only did I have to walk back through the two doors I just locked, but I also had to change my shoes and exit through the noisy front doors. Was this a sign I just shouldn’t go? I didn’t care, I was determined to go.

I step inside to put on sneakers, wash my hands, and put my sandals out to dry. I covered my nose to avoid inhaling the stench, but it was a strong, raw smell.

Somehow I make it through the front door, the squeaky rod iron gate and was out. I did it!

After having a great time with my new friends, I forgot about the messy situation until I made my way back home a few hours later. The house was dark. Everything was static, just as I left it. Did I get away with it? Maybe in previous life I was more of a bad ass then I am in this life....

Nope, not a chance.

The next day when I got home my host moms knew. How? The sandal with cat poop I left near the front door did me in along with the smeared cat poop all over the backyard. They had a good, hard laugh and were not upset at all. It actually

became a running joke and is a story they will not soon forget. They were very supportive and told me I should make the most of my time in Brazil.

In retrospect, sneaking out was a moment of personal growth. I ventured out of my comfort zone and did something bold in a different way than I have in the past. It was an exciting and terrifying experience to be spontaneous and irresponsible for one night. I am fortunate for that night when I snuck out because I made valuable connections. I had a great time getting to know new people, practicing my Portuguese, and exploring Brazilian culture.

When I think about my time in Floripa (as many locals refer to it), making connections with Brazilians is a priority for me because it allows me to practice my Portuguese, learn about culture, and have friends to come back to visit when I return to Brazil. That night I learned several bad words, feasted on delicious homemade Brazilian food (*linguiça, arroz com feijão, brigadeiro*), and practiced a few *samba* moves.

This experience taught me two things: 1.) Taking risks can pay off and 2.) Don't smear smelly cat droppings all over the backyard if you want to be sneaky.