

# FR

MAGAZINE

Brazil

- As meninas de ouro
- Um brasileiro marca trajetória nos EUA



**A HISTÓRIA DE  
UM VENCEDOR  
DR. 90210**

**THE STORY OF  
A WINNER  
DR. 90210**

## THE STORY OF A WINNER



**W**hen I saw the Statue of Liberty, I had the feeling that many immigrants experience - indeed, I am an immigrant. And, despite being only 11 years old, I cried and cried, knowing that my family would finally have a chance in life.

n a district of São Paulo, specifically in the suburb of Lapa, there lived a family: a mother and her children, two boys and two girls all living together in one room. The children's mother was from Rio Grande do Sul, in the South of Brazil, while the father was North American. One of the boys, a skinny, puny little boy, suffering from severe bronchitis, prompted the family to move to the coast of São Paulo, to Ilhabela. One day, American missionaries knocked on the door, and were shocked to see the deplorable conditions in which the family lived. One of them, Robert, slept with his mother on the table of the bedroom, in a city without electricity or drinking water. Who would have thought, that from that day, the destiny of that skinny little boy, Robert, just like in the fairy tales, would lead to him becoming famous in the international media as a great plastic surgeon, and the star of a television show aired in 173 countries, and watched by 370 million spectators. It was with great pride that **FR Brazil Magazine** interviewed this pleasant man, the charismatic **Doctor Robert Rey**, star of the famous American television series *Dr. 90210*.

**- Dr. Robert, what was your childhood like in Brazil?**

We lived in abject poverty. My two sisters, my brother and I lived with our mother, all sharing one room. My mother and I slept on top of an old table. In fact, I had never slept in a bed until I arrived in the United States. Nowadays, when I think about it, it was awful... I had such terrible bronchitis. My family and I moved to Ilhabela, but it wasn't the Ilhabela of today, where the children talk all the time through the internet. At that time, there was no electricity, no running water, and we lived in a house where I could see daylight through the holes in the wall. My mother was a saint. She raised the four of us all by herself.

**- How was it that the missionaries came across to you?**

One fine day, some American missionaries knocked on the door, and we ended up becoming great friends. They visited us twice a week, for several months. Missionary Orson Scott Card, who was the person responsible for my family and me moving here, is now a very famous writer and has published 50 books. One day, when Missionary Orson was talking with my father, he came up with the idea of bringing us to America, as we were living in very poor conditions in Brazil. My father, who had never shown any responsibility towards the family, was overjoyed to find himself rid of us.

**- You mentioned your father. Can you tell us a little about him?**

My father was born in Washington D.C. He was an engineer, graduated at NYU (New York University), very intelligent, but irresponsible. During my childhood, my father was never around because he lived in Santo André, and we never received any financial help from him, literally living in miserable poverty. This was because instead of spending money on his family, he always spent it on vacations in Europe with his lovers, and he was rarely in his apartment.

**- What was the journey like, with your family, to the United States?**

My father sent us to the United States in a cargo ship - I don't recall now if it was carrying bananas or cocoa - which was literally falling apart. The ship left the Port of Santos, and 19 days later, after sailing on very stormy seas, just like those voyages of the 18th Century, we arrived in the Port of New York, at six o'clock in the morning, in dense fog, with zero visibility. Then suddenly, in front of me, appeared the Statue of Liberty. It looked so beautiful. I had that feeling that many immigrants experience - indeed, I am an immigrant. And, despite being only 11 years old, I cried and cried, knowing that my family would finally have a chance in life.

**- What was your life like in Brazil before coming to America?**

Before leaving, I was already falling into delinquency, and during my last week in Brazil, I robbed my first store; so, I was already following the wrong path. Nowadays, 31 years later, when I write letters or talk to my friends' families, more than half of them are already dead or in jail, and others are drug addicts. It is incredible to think that if I had stayed in Brazil, my chances of still being alive or not in jail would be slim. It is not that Brazil is bad, but I was already following the wrong people.

**- When you arrived in the United States, what happened?**

After arriving in New York, I went to the home of the missionaries in Utah. When I arrived in Utah, I had a family for the first time, where the mother and father lived together, where they celebrated Christmas. My birthday was celebrated as if it was a great event. In Brazil, my parents had never celebrated my birthday. And years later, when I got married, I was able to apply what I had learned in that family of missionaries to my own family. Having come from a poor district in Brazil, I then left the home of this marvelous family in Utah and went to live on a ranch in Arizona with another family of missionaries - also

fantasy - where I had my own horse, drove trucks, and lived what was a life of fantasy for a boy like me.

**- Where was your mother during this period?**

It was not until I was in High School that my mother managed to get rid of my father back in São Paulo. My brother, sisters and I came over alone. Nowadays, I visit Brazil every year to promote the new season of the television show Dr. 90210 - by the way, the third season is about to come out. I will tell you something, it is amazing how women have changed in Brazil. These days, Brazilian women have a lot more self-confidence, they are more professional, and they have a place in society. Thirty-one years ago, Brazilian women didn't have a voice. So my mother would just say OK to anything my father said, you understand? Finally, she managed to escape his clutches and came to the United States. When my mother arrived here, the families who had adopted us returned us to our mother.

**- And this new stage with your mother in America, what was it like?**

Well, despite having my mother here, I did not have any money. So, even though we were living in the United States, we went back to a life of poverty. We lived in Prescott, a little village in the mountains, in the heart of Arizona, one and a half hours from Phoenix, but I returned to a life of poverty, it is incredible! So we all lived together again - our mother and the four children, in one room. It was not easy.

**- What were your teenage years like in the United States?**

That was when the racism began, which we immigrants, Brazilians, Latin Americans, often experience. I tell you, it is no life of fantasy. As we all know, it is so bed of roses. Sadly, there is racial discrimination here in the United States, which no longer exists in Brazil. I remember that in high school it was terrible, the kids were always beating me. I was really small and weighed just 94 pounds. I was very skinny. The kids would come round to my house and laugh at me, and they showed no respect. I am telling you this because when you see my show you will see that I do Tae-kwon Do, a martial art that I learned for personal defense, and which I now use to maintain physical and mental harmony. That period gave me the will to rise up in life and become somebody.

**- Dr. Robert, what was your greatest motivation for coming so far?**

I had lived with Christians for so many years that I ended up developing a spirituality that, of course, gives me a lot of energy. Spirituality gives you the will to overcome in life. The beauty of the gospel is that you always want to do better, which is why the gospel exists, to improve people. So, on one hand I had that good energy that comes from spirituality, and on the other hand, I already had an energy that was, unfortunately, of little quality, but that also helped, which was the energy that comes from being humiliated for so many years. My father, I always tell this, he was like the father of Ted Turner. His father always told him that he would not amount to anything in life. My father, on the few occasions I spoke with him, would call me a slouch. Early on in life, he was always calling me a slouch. I don't even know where he got that word from. So, humiliation can also give you the will to rise up in life.

**- When did you first get this desire to succeed in life?**  
I was tired of being the laughing stock of the other kids. That was how it all began. I was doing really badly in school, but in the final year I began to study like crazy. I studied non-stop. When I went to college, I never went out with girls, except once, as a favor for my teacher, I went out with his daughter. I studied so hard it was madness. I would get up at three in the morning every day to study, even when

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**I wanted to go to Harvard, have a television program, and wanted to end up going to the United States Congress. We Latin Americans need to become more involved in the American Congress. I explained all this to my family 20 or 30 years ago, and they never understood. They could never understand this motivation in me.**

**I take my wife Hayley, daughter Sydney and son Robert Jr. everywhere. That is what I learned. I believe that the most important thing in life are my children.**

there were no exams. I studied like crazy. Well, after studying for 14 years to become a plastic surgeon - 4 years in Medical school, 2 years on the Master's Degree, 1 year of internship, 4 years of residency, 2 years of general plastic surgery, and 1 year of cosmetic plastic surgery - I finally graduated. I went to Harvard University - Harvard Medical School, so I

did my internship at one of the best universities in the world. Really, my precarious situation helped me to become somebody. I was sick and tired of being poor.

**- Dr. Robert, tell us a little about your family in Brazil.**

The only family I have left in Brazil is my father. It is incredible that we were never close to our relatives, neither from my mother's family. We thought my father had died. One day, I received a phone call in my office from an old man, who said he was my father. Look how crazy the old man was! He simply said, "I am Robert's father, send me some money". He did not even ask if I was married, about his grandchildren, absolutely nothing. He had seen me on the Jô Soares show, found out my office's telephone number and called. And I send him money, even though he doesn't deserve it, but I send it anyway. Unfortunately, the only contact I have in Brazil is with him. Well, about my brother and sisters, they are all here in the United States. My sister lives here in Chicago, she is married to an American man, their children are already grown up, and my other sister lives here in southern California, in Orange County. She also went to Harvard University. My brother works in television, in commercials. That is how I got into television. My brother helped me get in, five years ago. My mother lives here in the United States. She helps my sister in Chicago with her kids.

**- About the American family who brought you here, are you still in contact with them?**

Oh yes, I keep in touch. They live here in Utah. They are elderly now; great people. The missionary who brought me over actually visited me this year. In this third season of the show, you will see photos of when he was a missionary.

**- Dr. Robert, how is your routine?**

Nowadays, I don't even have time to have my hair cut. Yesterday, for example, was Saturday, and I worked until 9 o'clock at night. I work six days a week, because I have the television show and certainly one of the largest plastic surgery clinics in the United States. As you see, Cris, I have so little time that I have to ask the hairdresser to come to my house, on a Sunday morning, to cut my hair. I am on television 3 or 4 times a week, you understand? That is why my hair has to be perfect.

**- Tell us about your move to Beverly Hills.**

I will tell you something. The community here in Hollywood is really strange, very introverted. In the first year that we were on television, the community did not accept us. Now look at their reaction this year. In the third year of the show, they suddenly began to accept us in the community. Now we are invited to all the parties and events. It is strange how they take years to accept someone. Larry King, for example, came to my daughter's last birthday. Last week, I played tennis in a tournament for celebrities only, on behalf of pediatric cancer research. Only this year I am beginning to get involved with the Hollywood community, but that is how things are.

**- Dr. Robert, how do you divide your time between work and family?**

You know, I have learned from some very busy people here, and it is the same in Florida for sure. I take my wife Hayley, daughter Sydney and son Robert Jr.