

## A Snippet of My Diary: “Early Memories in Fundraising”

*Every time I think about the whys and hows in fundraising, this memory comes to mind. As I was writing this piece, I spoke to my parents about it. My mom was quite surprised by how I remembered so many details and how impactful this experience actually was in my life, especially now as a fundraising professional.*

In the early 1990s, after months of preparation, the day had come. We were ready to open the gate and welcome them all.

I remember the bus driving in, the dust cloud on the road, and all those curious eyes looking through the windows. The kids were probably wondering where they were and what they would be doing at Monte Carmelo<sup>1</sup> that morning.



This was the first group of children to visit. Their parents were mostly sugar cane plantation workers, and these kids attended school only in the afternoons. In the mornings, they did not have supervised care or a safe place to stay. Monte Carmelo was a safe place that provided them with tutoring, activities, breakfast and lunch, and transportation to school in the afternoons.

When the bus stopped, social workers and a couple of teachers got off first, and then came the kids. There was a group of about 25, ranging from 6–12 years old. I was a child myself, a fourth grader, and my passion for this project was such that my mother allowed me to miss school that Monday so I could be there with her for opening day. I didn't know how much bigger my passion would become as I grew.



<sup>1</sup> [montecarmelo.org.br](http://montecarmelo.org.br)

First, breakfast! I remember helping in the kitchen and serving the children. I remember some of the kids' looks, wondering who I was. Was I there for the project as well? I hadn't traveled with them on the bus, so who was I? And why was I serving them, as we were basically the same age? After helping a bit, I sat

down to have breakfast as well, and the questions were many: “Who are you?” “Where are you from?” “Where do you live?” “Where do you go to school?”

The majority of these children were from underserved and racialized communities in a nearby countryside town called Porto Feliz (in São Paulo, Brazil), which literally means “happy port.” There was little difference between me and many of the girls, except I was from São Paulo and lived in a middle-class neighborhood, where my family was the only racialized family in our building. I was the only Black girl in my school classroom. My opportunities were many, but we had one thing in common—our blackness—and, as a result, we experienced much of the same discriminatory treatment, particularly in school.



A few months into the program, we were challenged. In July, there is a month-long winter school break in Brazil. We were concerned about maintaining Monte Carmelo without regular school-year support. The project received a food subsidy from the mayor’s office during the school year but not during the winter break.

Our main concern was how to provide the assistance for these kids when they were going to need it the most—during school break, when they would have minimal adult supervision because their parents would be working. The project did not have enough funds for a month’s food supply, but my mother, with her great determination, refused to close the program during the winter break.

One morning, I remember my mom decided to put her business acumen to use and simply go to the town nearby, stop at food businesses and talk about the project. Her intention was to try and stretch the little money the program had and negotiate reduced rates to purchase as much food as possible. I went with her and had the benefit of experiencing the beauty of caring and giving.

First, we had to figure out where to go. Our first stop was at the mayor’s office to get some supplier addresses and names. Due to their familiarity with the program, the mayor’s office recommended that we use them as a reference, which would surely bolster our cause.

On our journey, there were a couple of businesses that I'll never forget: the rice wholesaler and the chicken supplier.

At the rice wholesaler, we spoke with the owner. Once he heard about what the project was offering the kids, he immediately asked his staff to package whatever amount of rice we needed and put it in the car, *all free of charge*. With his support, we were able to secure all the rice we needed for the



month. He then recommended we go to a chicken supplier and mention that he had sent us and had already donated all the rice we needed.

When we got to the chicken supplier, the manager was already expecting us and had already decided on his gift. He gave us a month's supply of chicken and offered to deliver it to us every couple of days. My mom's dedication and willingness to inspire philanthropy are the reasons Monte Carmelo remained open during that winter break.

These donations and the money available were enough to cover the other costs, and the program successfully ran for the entire month of July.

Thirty years later, I am proud to share that this program has evolved and grown and now serves approximately 190 children per day, with a waitlist of over 200.

*In many ways, when I think about my career journey, this day at Monte Carmelo always comes to mind. Why? Because it was there that I recognized the presence of philanthropy in my life, and how my parents have always been involved in it, especially my mom, a fundraiser by heart. It is also where my passion and belief in my profession resides. And it is also where I experienced firsthand the power of healing, community and transformation.*



*This work at Monte Carmelo was service to others and in many ways a healing vehicle for me, my family, my mother and the many families we served who had been marginalized for generations in Brazil.*

*The healing process, as I see it, is not an individual process but a collective one, where we soften our pain by understanding our path while building new routes to an inclusive and more equitable journey.*

*We, together as Black women, face daily challenges simply for being who we are and what we represent. But nonetheless, we should never forget the unique position this gives us to break paradigms, destroy stereotypes, institute a new discourse and give visibility to the invisible.*

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Camila Vital Nunes Pereira is passionate about urban issues, community engagement, social inequality, and inclusion & diversity. She has dedicated her studies and career to making a difference in these areas. Camila has been in the fundraising profession for over four years and is currently a senior fundraising officer at the Child Development Institute, an accredited children's mental health agency in Toronto offering groundbreaking, evidence-based programs for children ages 0-12 and youth ages 13-18, and their families. Her responsibilities include the strategic planning for corporate, foundations, and individual giving portfolios.

Camila holds a Ph.D. in Public Policy/Public Administration & International Relations and a MA in Educational Policy & Administration both from Howard University (USA), and a BA in Education from University of Sao Paulo (Brazil). Committed to the belief that we are citizens of the world, and that service to others is an edifying noble life purpose, she embraces her work as an opportunity to contribute to the betterment of our society.