



Talmo Pereira
2014 Broad Prize Scholar Remarks

Thank you, Mr. Reed, for the kind introduction. It is an honor to be here. My presence on this stage is something I never would have anticipated when I moved here six years ago.

I was born in Brazil, where I spent the first 16 years of my life. Brazil's profound socioeconomic disparities were both my world growing up as well as my single working mother's motivation to emigrate.

My mom dropped out of college to get married, but divorced not long after I was born. Growing up, we lived in an impoverished area of Brazil on the rural outskirts of São Paulo. My mom worked out of her brother's storage shed and started a small catering business to make ends meet. She wanted her only son to have access to a good education and opportunities for a better life thereafter, but the education system in Brazil was woefully ineffective and the accompanying career prospects were, at best, bleak.

So when I was seven years old, my mom left me in the care of my grandmother and paraplegic uncle in Brazil, and moved to the U.S. in pursuit of opportunities for a better life for her son. She first arrived in Florida and didn't know any English, so she picked up odd jobs – housekeeping, delivering newspapers, cleaning, and so on, eventually finding a steady position as a nanny in Maryland. It took eight years before she was finally able to save enough money to bring me to the United States.

All in all, it was not until 2008, days before my 16th birthday, that we were truly reunited.

Early on, my mom would save money to sporadically bring me here on short visits. Although brief, these visits were enough to allow me to pick up English by watching Pokémon cartoons – one of my more *serious* childhood vices. I was an avid reader, so by the time I immigrated to the States I had managed to retain enough mastery of the language to start high school as a sophomore. I was soon faced with other challenges, however.

Despite having received good marks in my coursework in Brazil, my grades were translated into Cs and Ds, if at all, under the American school system. Consequently, I was barred from enrolling in Advanced Placement courses by my school counselors until much later.

Undeterred, I continued on my pursuit for knowledge and looked for other opportunities to prove myself. My break finally came along when I was accepted into an internship program to do

research at the National Institutes of Health during my senior year. I was immediately hooked – I knew then and there that I wanted to devote my career to science.

But before I go into all of that, there's something I need to emphasize. My mom fought tooth and nail to get me to the U.S. so that I could be successful, and I hold myself accountable to her sacrifice. If my mom was willing to do all of these things for me, then I must be willing to work just as hard to accomplish my goals and succeed.

She is here in the audience with us today. So I'd like to take a moment to thank her for all that I've mentioned, and so much more – Obrigado mãe.

Now, to give you some context, Brazil, as you may know, is a burgeoning economic world power. However, just as it boasts the world's highest executive salaries, Brazil also has a federal minimum wage just shy of \$2.

The rural area where I was raised was plagued by these socioeconomic disparities and with them, the problems that arise from poverty. In particular, substance addiction and untreated psychiatric disease ran rampant in my community. At a young age, these tragedies were impressed upon me and I soon became captivated with understanding them.

Throughout my formative years, this curiosity about the mind took me on an intellectual journey. I ventured from the realms of philosophy and literature, where I became consumed with Dostoyevsky's lurid descriptions of mental anguish; to psychology and medicine, where Oliver Sack's case studies fascinated me. I finally found my calling in Neuroscience – the study of the biology of the brain.

After my experience at the NIH, I finished high school in Montgomery County, Maryland, and won the Broad Prize scholarship in 2011. I subsequently began my undergraduate studies in computational biology at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where I am currently a senior.

The Broad Prize scholarship made my college education financially feasible, certainly, but it also set off a series of events that shaped my career in ways that I could have never imagined. As a freshman, I applied and was accepted to a summer research position at the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard. There, I had the opportunity to investigate the neurobiology of bipolar disorder. I later learned that despite being a freshman, I stood out in the highly competitive selection process because of the Broad Prize.

That experience, in turn, was a springboard for more opportunities in neuroscience. The following summer I did research at MIT, creating tools to map the wiring of the brain, and returned as a visiting student for a whole semester to continue working on my project. And the summer after that, I was accepted to a selective research program at Caltech, where I did research into the neuroscience of aggression.

So here I am today. I hold a 3.9 GPA and am currently applying to Ph.D. programs in neuroscience starting in the fall of 2015. I hope that one day I will be able to use all that I've learned to help understand and treat psychiatric disease.

With that, I would like to take this opportunity to express my utmost gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Broad for the role they have played in helping me and my mom realize this dream – and to all of you for all that you do to make these opportunities possible for kids like me.

Thank you.