

Smiles on the Xingu

Taking your hands and your talent out of the limits of your office's walls evokes an inexplicable feeling. This movement creates a beautiful connection between Dentistry and its essence. You and your patients. Just you and they. Not a business relationship.

You bring them smiles, health and good esthetics for the simple reason that you love thy neighbor and love the profession you chose. A rational choice; there is no godliness in doing this type of work — it is just social justice. Everyone should try it. In one of these occasions, I landed in eastern Xingu, in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil. There, I met a Brazilian indigenous man called Wetanti Suyá, son of the cacique of the Wawí people and a dental assistant working in indigenous health care. An endeavor of painstaking perseverance in places that lack everything: no resins, no bonding agents, no working dental chair, no sutures... The only thing they do not miss is love: no lack of love there.

Dentists hired by the government are tied to basic procedures — that is, when the performance of even those is possible. These dentists promote health and education as best as they can. Wetanti Suyá is one of those people that would be flying high had he been given the opportunity. I had the pleasure of working side by side with him for some days.

While seeing patients, we talked a lot. He, very shy, and I, very curious, were gradually bonding through empathy.

– Wetanti, how old are you?

– 30 something.

– What do you mean 30 something? Want to sound younger than you are?

He smiled shyly.

–You kind of look more like you're 40, huh?

He smiled again, the smile of someone who has a truly good soul. We smiled together.

And kept on talking.

He went on helping me and asking about materials – what is this, what is that used for, how do I do it (when he did not already know how to use something).

And we went on learning about each other as human beings who had the same passion: Dentistry.

When we finished seeing patients, he invited me to visit the maloca that he shared with his family. I saw so many hammocks hanging there that I believe he lived with some 20 other people.

A pleasant, silent environment that was taken by the sounds of the explanations about everything there – it was time for him to satisfy my curiosity.

I made a friend and, eventually, got something from him and his mother: a large jar of fermented cassava flour and a necklace she herself had made.

The great experiences in life happen out of your comfort zone. Staying “inside the box” for a whole life is a choice: for me, that was never an option.





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