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Blinded Brazilian student sings through recovery

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A Brazilian student blinded in a downtown Calgary shooting said he's relearning how to do everything in his life.

CBC News



Jose Ribamar Ribeiro Neto sang a Portuguese song in the Calgary Eyeopener studio on Monday. (CBC)

Jose Ribamar Ribeiro Neto visited the CBC's Calgary Eyeopener studio Monday morning to talk about adjusting to his blindness.

"I have to learn everything," Ribeiro told CBC Radio host Jim Brown. "I have to learn how to read, how to type, how to walk, how to drink water, how to go to the washroom.... Everything."

But the 25-year-old, who was in a band in his native Brazil, was upbeat enough to play his guitar and sing a reggae-themed song in Portuguese in the studio.

Ribeiro had been in the city for about six months to study English with his girlfriend when he was shot just below the eye as the couple left a restaurant and walked along Centre Street South on Sept. 16.

Police said Ribeiro was an innocent bystander and the bullet that blinded him was fired during an altercation between a man and two other people in a park down the street.

Ribeiro credited an interest in reading spiritual books several years ago for his positive outlook on his current situation.

"I just believe in something bigger," he explained. "When you read a lot, you can ... take the best things."

"I [started] to practise how can I do, be less selfish and be less complainer, and live good, live well."

Joining Ribeiro for his interview was Kevin Taylor, a local restaurant owner who donated a home for the Brazilian and his family to stay in and has become a friend.

Taylor recalled the first night he met Ribeiro and his parents, who flew to Calgary from Fortaleza in northeastern Brazil.

"I was overwhelmed by how nice they were, how warm they received me and I'm a perfect stranger, and something drastic and tragic has just happened to their son, and instantly felt a connection."

The Brazilian Community Association of Alberta is holding a fundraising concert Nov. 5 at the Jack Singer Concert Hall featuring Brazilian jazz artists Flora Purim and Airto Moreira.

Taylor said Ribeiro, who is staying in Calgary for his recovery, will need specialized equipment to do even daily tasks like telling time or turning down a thermostat.

"Determining the costs of blindness is very complex. No one anywhere in the world has come up with a perfect, undisputed research on the cost of blindness," Taylor said.

Ribeiro said he's focusing on his recovery for now: "I want to go to my country, but this country has lots of things for me and I want the option.... When I have to choose it, I have to make a good choice."

Roland Ashley Warawa, 30, faces several charges in the case, including two counts of attempted murder.