

Confidence

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## WHY ENGLISH IS IMPORTANT FOR ME

The United States is the land of freedom. The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, speech, and the press. This country also allows its citizens and immigrants to keep their own cultures, religions, and languages. This multiculturalism is the reason why America became a great nation. It encourages diversity. Some people have concerns about allowing linguistic pluralism. Those who advocate an English only system have created an issue important for all Americans because this country has never established an official language. So the question is: should English become the official language?

I want to share my background and opinion on this subject. It seems to me that people who want to come to live in the United State should learn English. But I understood that even while living in Cambodia, knowledge of English would offer me the opportunity to find a good job. All Cambodians speak Khmer, the official language, but it is used only by Cambodian people. We are proud of our language because it reflects our culture. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, religion, money, and ownership were all banned. The authoritarian government dictated the life of every Cambodian citizen. All rights were discarded. Thousands of years of Cambodian history were forced to come to an end.

After the war, the country had to start from scratch. The school system was a mess. It would be hard for you to imagine how Cambodian kids like me could hope and envision any future for us. But a new generation rose from the darkness. Without our setting goals, we would be lost at sea with no hope of reaching the shore. Because we had been controlled by France, French was the dominant foreign language. We had no choice. By the time I finished high school, times had changed. Because of the world economic

situation, English had become a popular choice of language study. It was quite chaotic. Some university curricula were based on French, some on English. The challenge for me was that all of my studies and exposure to a foreign language had been in French, not English, so I had to start all over again. I wanted to enroll in an English-based university in Cambodia and study business. All the texts were in English. It was extremely difficult for me. I suffered from a complicated and mismanaged educational system.

In 2006, I immigrated to the United States. Language became an even more difficult issue for me. My English was limited, and my pronunciation was terrible. I felt I was in an alien world. I could not speak very rapidly, did not understand the proper body language, and on top of that I suffered from the cold weather so different than the hot climate of my homeland. I was cold inside and out. I had no self-confidence. Every aspect of daily life was a challenge for me. But I was determined to become part of this great country, and I knew I needed to learn English.

I enrolled in an adult ESL class at Case Western Reserve University. Everyone was very nice and friendly. I started feeling comfortable and began to use English. My self-confidence grew stronger. It was a wonderful experience. I had to use English to communicate with my classmates who came from Mexico, India, China, Japan, Brazil, South Korea, Romania, Taiwan, etc. Sometimes they used their native languages to help each other, but I was alone. This was hard but good for me. I was forced to go directly to the English. The more I learned the happier I felt. English is a language that I can now use to express my emotions and to communicate to different groups of people. It is what brings us together. It creates a tight and lasting bond between total strangers. There are so many foreign languages spoken in this country due to immigration, but it is important that English be used as the common language so that all foreign speaking

immigrants can communicate clearly and assimilate into one common culture.

This is my second year here in America. I feel safe and secure and warm despite the winter winds. My new world seems quite beautiful, and the sense of freedom and equality here is inspiring. With my new English skills, I can travel all around the globe without fear. I am now ready to help others master this language.

*~Sophea Heng*

### A YOUNG INTERN PROVES HER WORTH

My sister-in-law, Ai, has been interning at the United Nations in New York for two months. From the moment Ai decided to come here from China, we told her that we could ask our friends living there to give her a hand, such as picking her up at the airport and helping her rent an apartment. But she refused the help.

At just 21, Ai has lots of courage. She entered the university she had dreamed of and has worked in several foreign companies in Peking and Shanghai during her summer vacations. Last year she was recommended to the best university in China for graduate work with a full scholarship while others have to take the strict entrance examinations. Still, to us, she is a little girl.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> day of November, we received a message saying she had settled down in a small apartment in Manhattan and would begin work two days later. My husband was busy, so he suggested that I fly there to see if the “little girl” was okay. Again, Ai declined the offer, saying she would be busy preparing for work.

The following days, everything seemed to be going well. She sent messages and pictures through her blog nearly every day. This way we could get a general idea of her daily life. We didn't visit her until the Spring Festival Eve, and then just for a day. The moment we came into her apartment, we were surprised by the sight of a huge teddy bear she had brought from Beijing. An hour later, we followed her into the UN. There was an exhibition about Chinese oracle-bone inscriptions, and she was the speaker.

Looking at this young woman dressed in career apparel and speaking with confidence, we knew she had been

right when she had told us that we didn't need to worry about her. After the presentation, we enjoyed a delicious dinner for the Chinese New Year and a concert in Carnegie Hall. The next afternoon we left NY after a delightful visit to Chinatown. She had arranged everything for us perfectly.

On the way back to Cleveland, I thought of a lot of other undergraduates such as Ai. Most of them were born in 1987 or after. They are open, independent, and confident. They have broad knowledge of the world, strong characters, and all speak fluent English. Their parents are the first generation who enjoyed some wealth after China initiated some reform and opened up to the rest of the world. This young generation is much luckier than their parents. They have only one or two children in their families and have been raised with great care. They are a product of the advancement of information, not only through the Internet but also from trips, schooling abroad, and internships such as Ai's. They seem liberal and enjoy entertainment like young Americans, but are also hard workers aware of the competitive pressure from their numerous peers. At the same time, they have learned to take responsibility for family, friends, and society. This is shown in their independence and their initiative.

Before we left, Ai said work was hard in every country now, but harder at the UN. How ironic to hear such serious thoughts from the "little girl" who lugged that giant teddy bear all the way from China. How beautiful to think of her hopes and dreams for her future.

*~XianXian Wang*

## I CAN TIE MY SHOES

Crisscross underneath,

Pull it to my feet.

Make a tree,

Leave a root.

Around the tree,

Through the root,

Pull it to my boot.

Hurray! I did it by myself!

*~Monique Privara*



## GOOD NEWS

Hello. I am 63 years old. In 2008 I got to vote for the first time in my life.

I did not have the skills and confidence to vote because I did not know what the process was all about. I could not read and write. I was basically ignorant about knowing how to vote or even why I wanted to vote.

I have been tutored for three years. The first time my tutor and I met she asked me if I was a registered voter. I replied no. I did not know how to read the ballots.

My tutor brought me a long way. She helped me with registering to vote, gave me the skills to read the ballots, and let my voice be heard as an American.

Just one voice being heard can encourage millions. My voice would not matter one way or the other, I felt. If we all felt that way, we would not have a democracy.

You can know that your vote does count. It is about freedom and opinion.

In closing, I will say to each and every one, get out and vote.

I voted for a winner in the presidential election. My tutor made me a winner. So I want to thank her for giving me confidence to vote and voice my opinion.

I'm an American citizen.

I love this country – the U.S.A.

*~Ronald W. Fugate*

## I KNOW MY PAST IS MY PAST

I know my past is my past  
And I couldn't change that.  
I act tough, but my insides are scarred  
More than a slave's back.  
I procrastinate too much  
And need to start doin' things ASAP.  
It's tough 'cause at the same time  
I'm dealin' with life's drama.  
Good thing my confidence level  
Is as hard to crack as a knight's armor.  
I keep to myself 'cause you never know  
Who might harm ya.  
So I keep to myself just to keep myself safe  
'Cause your enemies got more pockets  
Than a CD case, and you never know  
Which pocket got a weapon.  
And gettin' around it is like  
Trying to avoid shit  
Without steppin' in it.

~Myran Clark

## A NEW LIFE

On 20 March 2003, my life in Iraq as I knew it ended. A new life began. At that time my husband and I had a 2-month old baby. We wanted to build our new life in Iraq, but circumstances beyond our control suddenly stopped our plans. The bombs and chaos started; there was no security, no calm. After four years in Baghdad and the birth of our second son, we realized for our children's sake that we must come up with a plan for their future. We wanted them to grow up in a peaceful land and to be well educated.

We decided to move to Jordan, where we lived for about one year. Even though I couldn't work as a pharmacist, being with my family in a calm, modern country was more important. We enrolled our kids in preschool and kindergarten so they could learn how to communicate with others and get over the terrible memories that they had endured.

Then everything changed when my brother made a simple call and told me that we would come to the U.S.A. soon. Maybe not as quickly as we would want, but it was going to happen. We arrived in the U.S.A. in the fall of 2008, and our new life began again.

First, we set up our home. Then we enrolled our children in their schools. Next, we learned what type of certification we would need to begin working again as a pharmacist and a physician. Right now we are learning English and studying for testing and certification in our fields. The kids have settled into our new life, and we are hopeful that once we can work again we will be happy and peaceful once more.

*~Rawaa AM Taki*

### WHY I WANT TO STAY HERE LONGER

I decided to come to the USA while I was working at Tumble Tots. Tumble Tots is a developmental child center where the English language is used to teach Thai kids. It became my dream to come to the USA to be an au pair to improve my English skills and most importantly to find new experiences by traveling.

Finally, I got a host family in Cincinnati, Ohio. While I was living here I got two weeks for vacation. I had a great opportunity to go to California on the west coast and to New York on the east coast. The weather was pretty different from place to place. I would love to visit each place again. I plan to start traveling again from Ohio. The Midwest of the USA is very interesting to me too. I would like to visit Chicago and Colorado.

I'm always very excited when I'm going to travel to new places. Especially in the USA, everything such as food, weather, culture, language, and driving is different from Thailand. But this is not a problem for me. I'm ready to learn something new everyday. I want to get as much experience as I can.

I'm studying in an ESOL class, and I enjoy this class. I have met friends from other countries in Europe, South America, and Asia. The friendships have helped me learn more about lifestyles. When I came to the class for the first time, I was embarrassed and nervous to introduce myself to everybody, but I have had a great teacher, Susan, and many volunteers to help me improve my English. My goals are to improve my speaking, reading, and pronunciation. In two and a half hours I get a lot of new information that I should know about English. I enjoy the discussion at the end of each class

because it helps me improve speaking, and we can share our opinions.

I was really worried about taking a test when I first arrived, but I learned that my score was not bad! Three months later, I took a test again. I improved! Hooray! I would love to continue studying in this classroom until the last day of class in May.

I want to feel confident and comfortable among different people from different cultures. I want to overcome my insecurities of being a foreigner and absorb as much of the American way as possible, as well as many of the cultures represented in the USA.

When I go back to Thailand, I would like to be a tourist guide. I plan to take group tour travels, in-bound and out-bound. Then I plan to study for my Master's degree with a major in Tourism Management. I graduated in Hotel & Tourism Management for my Bachelor's degree. Now I have experience in traveling abroad, so I want to use my knowledge and experience to get the best job possible.

*~Kaew Khonken*

## G.E.D.

I'm sitting in class and was just informed that the test results are still not in.

I told them, "That's O.K., I still enjoy coming to class."

Coming here is refreshing; people are learning what people are teaching. The atmosphere is encouraging and pleasant. It's a healthy way to learn and teach. These people are here because they really enjoy helping people learn and grow. They are really the definition of "teachers."

The students are here because it was either court ordered or the opportunity is here to really finish something they started. Either way, if they succeed in getting their G.E.D., it will be because they wanted to do it.

To finish something you started is a very good feeling! Personally, I have found every hour I spent here very rewarding. I brushed up on skills I've used over the last 30 years. I found I remembered more than I thought. Things I forgot I was able to learn over or remember.

This is my way of saying Thank You! Thank You! Thank You! Without your help, without your guidance and instructions, I never would have succeeded! You made your time and talent available to me and from the bottom of my heart I am thankful. I want to go to college so now I am waiting for the results. If I pass, I can sign up for college. I will be fulfilling my dream. Better late than never!

I raised two children and both went to college. I have two grandchildren, 11 and 13 years old. I told them, "Boys, Grandma's going to college to fulfill a dream." They think it's

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“kool” and “awesome” to follow your dreams. Thanks to you, I was able.

~Constance Kocher

