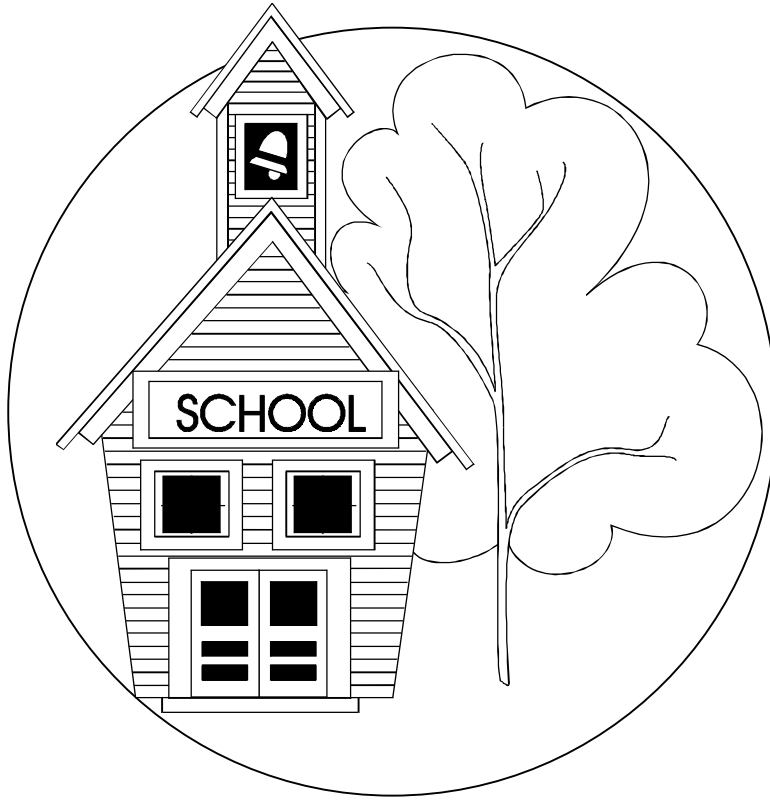


# Learning



## Miscommunications

Since I began living in the U.S.A., I have had a lot of experiences that I would not have had if I lived in Japan. Now, I try to remember them. Some of them make me laugh, and some of them make me feel sorry.

There were many reasons why these things happened to me. However, I know the biggest reason is that I was not able to communicate with Americans much then. I could read English, but I did not speak or listen to English well. I did not know the American way of thinking, their customs, and their culture, either. Here are two of my funny experiences.

### In the Restroom

I was bewildered when I went into a public restroom in the U.S. The reason was that I was able to see a person's feet inside each stall from under the stall's door and wall. Also I sometimes found a little space between the door and wall; consequently, I was afraid that I would be able to see the person inside even if I was not trying to peep.

In my country, it is usually impossible to see inside a stall from the outside in a restroom. I do not know exactly, but each door and wall is higher than six feet at least. I have never seen a space between the door and wall in each stall. In Japan I believe that nobody can see inside of a stall from the outside since it is very secret.

One day, I went to a restroom in an U.S. restaurant. There were some young ladies, and they enjoyed talking. I usually only hear English conversations as a noise if I do not listen too carefully. Therefore, I did not care what they were talking about at that time.

Soon after I went into a toilet stall, those ladies went out of the restroom. Then, it became quiet in the restroom. I heard a different person's voice a little bit later, but I did not pay attention at first. I heard the same voice again. I knew there were only two people -- a lady in the next stall and me -- in the restroom. She asked me something, but I did not understand what she asked. I was confused in the toilet stall, but I just said, "Yes?" Since she did not say anything again, I was a little relieved and went out the toilet stall. While I was washing my hands, the lady came out of the toilet stall.

She looked very angry. She glared at me and said something; however, I did not understand her. I said nervously, "I cannot understand English well." She roughly said a few words to me and went out of the restroom.

I did not understand why that lady was so angry. I was not sure what I should do at that time? I could not guess anything. I also experienced an unpleasant feeling.

I asked some friends and my English teachers about that situation because I was anxious about it. I finally got an answer. That lady must have asked me to give her toilet tissue! It was possible for me to give her a piece of tissue because there was enough space under the wall in this American stall, unlike Japan. However, since I had never asked and heard "Give me tissue" in a toilet stall before, I could not even guess anything.

I now understand that this situation could happen again, but such a case has never happened to me since.

### **Greetings**

When we see a person whom we know, we usually greet the person. I guess that it is common all over the world. Greeting is very important. Sometimes we may be judged as to our character by how we greet others.

In my country -- Japan -- we usually bow with some greeting words. When we see friends, we bow lightly. We just move our head ahead a little bit. When we see superiors, seniors, elders, and so on, we bow deeply. We usually move our head about thirty degrees ahead slowly and move back slowly. We show our respect to the person when we move our heads lower than the other person's head.

We usually do not touch the person's body when we greet. If we touch the person's body when we do a normal greeting, it might include a very special meaning. They might love each other, for example.

I had heard that Americans sometimes shake hands as a greeting. When a person offers me his or her hand, I was told to shake it firmly. If I show my hand limply, Americans would feel badly toward me.

I guess that shaking hands is a very common mannerism for Americans but not for Japanese. Therefore, we make mistakes accidentally when we shake hands. We are often flustered at a moment when somebody offers a hand. Then we stretch out our hand in great haste. Moreover, we hesitate about touching other people, so we stretch out our hands modestly and limply.

I believed that I understood how to shake hands. I always paid attention only "to shake hands tightly!" when I greeted Americans.

One day I went to a casual party at a friend's house. I saw many new faces there. We introduced each other and usually shook

hands. I intended to do so in my usual way, in other words, "to shake hands tightly when I greet Americans."

"Ouch!" a man shouted with laughter as soon as I shook his hand. Such a reaction was the first time for me. At first I did not understand what happened. Soon I became aware of my misunderstanding.

It is very natural that if I shake somebody's hand with all my might, the person would have pain. I cannot remember how many people's hands I have shaken with all my might. Everybody smiled at me without saying "Ouch!" when I shook his or her hand. I am sure that they must have endured their hand's pain. If the man had not said anything, I would not have realized that my hand shaking was too strong, yet.

I am sorry for people who felt pain when shaking hands with me...I meant no harm.

-- *Yuki Ohashi*

## A Tribute to the Step-Up Experience

Soft-spoken Shirley,  
Never-late Lou,  
Debbie's percentages,  
And decimals too.

Hazel's hard candy,  
Louisa's quick wit,  
Karen's endurance,  
Kathy's etiquette.

Customer service  
With Suzanne was inspired.  
We don't know by what,  
But we're glad she was hired.

Nancy and Gene,  
We found you compelling.  
Our self-esteem's grown,  
Our egos are swelling.

The skills that we've learned,  
The friends that we've met,  
The laughs that we've shared,  
We'll not soon forget.

Andrea and Peggy,  
You've helped us become  
So very job savvy.  
Hey World!! Here we come!!!

*-- Karen Bowman*

## Never Give Up

For me, the English language is a big problem. It is an obstacle to my studying. I am always anxious about how to speak and write well in English. I never think that I will become a good speaker or a writer. I just need enough to understand what the instructor explains in class and communicate with people effectively. I feel like this because English is the key for me to open the door of knowledge.

When I was a high school student, the English language was very strange and not interesting for me in my country of Vietnam. Students were mostly given written homework to do, but very rarely spoke English at school or at home. At that time, I felt the English language was only useful for some people who worked with Americans. So at school, I did not concentrate on English. Also, I thought that the English language was only necessary for me if I was living in the U.S.

Now I know how important and necessary English is. I am always confused and embarrassed when I have to communicate with people around me at work, especially on the telephone. It makes me frustrated when I can't understand what people are saying. I often ask for people to write it down for me, and then I use the dictionary as a tool to understand the meaning.

In these situations, I have learned more about vocabulary and have become more interested in the English language. I have taken pre-GED classes at my workplace – Pierre Foods' Learning Center. At home, I concentrate on my English, practicing reading and writing. I believe that the best way to improve my English is PRACTICE, PRACTICE PRACTICE!

Reading "Love Your Problems" from the book named Becoming a Master Student, I have learned that accepting and admitting the problems I have with English can help me to learn more about it. Now I am on my way to improving my English. In my mind, I always will tell myself, "NEVER GIVE UP!"

-- Ruan Luong

## Four Steps

Two steps forward and four steps  
back. That's the way it's always been.  
I can't move ahead for falling behind.

What's a girl supposed to do?  
I try to be on top of things, but when I  
least expect it, I fall flat on my face.  
Four steps forward and two steps back.  
That's the way it's going to be now.

-- *Karen S. Smith*

## Safety At Home

The home is considered to be a man's castle, a place to relax, a place of renewal from our busy lives. Therefore, it should be safe and secure, keeping harm at a distance.

Many elements are important in securing our homes. We must look at the outside structure of our dwellings. Is the roof in good repair? Are all the windows intact with storms and locks? Are the doors and storm doors well fitting and supplied with secure locks?

The inside of our dwellings could have hidden problems that may threaten our lives or be financially costly. Faulty electrical wiring, that we never see, could make our homes death traps. A furnace in bad repair is dangerous and can be costly. A small drip in a faucet could cost hundreds of dollars a year. Leaks can also cause mold and fungus to grow, which is unhealthy to our respiratory systems. Another harm is carbon monoxide, which may give us headaches or flu-like symptoms. In older homes, one needs to be careful when stripping woodwork lest there be a coat of lead paint beneath other coats of paint.

The bathroom can be the most unsafe room in our homes. Always use a rubber mat in the tub; it is the number one place for falls in the home. Water and electricity are a deadly combination, so remember to unplug the personal care appliances and put them away after use.

The kitchen is the next spot in the home. Make sure electric appliances are unplugged and that extension cords are not strewn across floors or counters. Keep knives in a block or a separate drawer to prevent cuts. Put childproof locks on cupboards and drawers to prevent little ones from exploring. A fire extinguisher is necessary in this room.

Throughout our homes extension cords; cable cords; and cords from curtains, traverse rods, and mini blinds should be secured to prevent tripping or strangulation. Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors; put non-slip pads under throw rugs, and arrange furniture with a free walkway around it.

When our homes are as safe and secure as we can make them, we must think about keeping them safe. Use an outside light as well as a small inside light when you go out. Keep unknown visitors, even the pizza deliveryman, on your doorstep. Don't give personal information over the telephone. Be aware of your neighbors, their comings and goings, in order to recognize strangers in your neighborhood. No matter how safe and secure we think we are, there is always a chance of danger, so keep a list of emergency numbers by your phone and pray for God's protection.

*-- Kathy Brooks*



## **My Life's Dream**

In my life I have many things that I need to do for myself. One of them is that I must get my GED diploma. This is one of the most important goals that I have set for myself. I have come to realize that studying and reading help me to learn and are essential to my everyday living.

It would be good if I could remember to pick up a book every day and just read for pleasure. Limiting the time that I watch television could also benefit me. I have books at my house on math and English that I could use everyday to help me. Another thing that is important for me to do is to show up for my GED classes as much as I can.

I have had the opportunity to attend three GED graduation ceremonies. Being there among the students who have achieved getting their GED diplomas made me feel good inside and happy for them. When the time comes for me to get mine, I want to feel just as good as those who have already accomplished their dreams.

I can visualize in my mind how I will feel when I receive my GED diploma. I will be relieved and very proud of myself. Accomplishing this goal will open doors for me. Getting my diploma will be something that I can cherish for the rest of my life.

*-- Nora Thomas*

## Where Does It Hurt?

When you go to the doctor, they ask you, "Where does it hurt?" But if you have a very hard time reading, or do not know how to read, they do not ask you this. They ask you, "Why can't you read?"

When you go for help to learn to read, it takes all you have to walk through the door to get help, because it hurts to let someone know that you can't read.

This is one of the big hurts that adult learners have. So, when you start to learn, you need to talk about why you did not learn as a child. This helps to stop the hurt that most adult learners have, so you can learn and start to heal. The healing will take a long time, but if you talk and tell people your story a little at a time, you can heal faster.

People are not all bad. Some people like to listen and help adults learn. Some people call the healing process "shame," but I think that's a very bad hurt and you don't want to get hurt anymore.

This hurt makes you think you are no good or people are better than you are. Some adult learners think their voices mean very little. As an adult learner, I have learned that your voice is very powerful and people need to know how you feel, so you can get the help you need.

One more thing you need to know. Adult learners are not alone. There are many of us out there that can help you, if you need and want help.

*-- Dale Sherman*

## **A Place to Learn**

**L**earning is fun.

**I**nteresting subjects.

**V**aluing your education.

**E**ncouraging each other.

**O**utstanding performances.

**A**sking questions.

**K**nowing how to succeed.

**S**tudying hard.

**A**ccomplishing a dream.

**B**ecoming better educated.

**L**eaping toward a goal.

**E**ntering a new beginning.

*This was a project with a group of morning ABLE students:*

*-- Yuki Ohashi*

*-- Vicki Hargraves*

*-- Monica Bustos*

*-- Rosalba McCain*

*-- Sherril Knight*

*-- Kum Sun Kim*

## The Greatness in Yourself

In life you don't get many chances to correct the mistakes you make. I dropped out of high school when I was in the tenth grade. School was always a struggle for me. I would ask questions, but the teachers never really explained so I would understand completely.

Most people look back on their mistakes and feel as if there is nothing they can do. I have felt this way most of my life. I always felt that something was holding me back from what and who I wanted to be. One day a close friend told me, "I want to see you shine. I know you have greatness within yourself."

Everyone has a special talent they can find only if they explore what they fear the most. For me, it was the fear of not knowing if I was intelligent enough to get my GED or even to try. I would always set myself up to fail.

Although my parents gave up on me long ago, I have two wonderful children who have never given up hope for me. They are the only two who remain. I look into my children's eyes, and they see me as a person who can do anything, so how could I ever fail them? I want my children to be proud of their mother and to know she dropped out of school. I can't show them the importance of education if I don't show myself first. I don't want my children to feel empty like I have most of my life because I didn't finish my education.

My oldest child will be starting school this fall. I felt like this was the perfect time to continue my education. I always wanted to get my GED so I could go to college. I want my children to see that I can provide for them. I want to show them they can be anything they want to be. In order to be a good provider, I know in my heart it starts with getting my GED. I never knew how important continuing your education was until I became an adult.

Too many women settle for less when they have so much in life to explore. If you are a mother or just who you are, believe that everyone has greatness within. Don't let your fears consume you. Break free, face your fears, and you will eventually shine.

-- Stacy Jones