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Author's note: I wrote this essay when my instructor asked me to describe the most incredible moment in my life because it told about my background as well as the events that helped me develop my career goals. I chose to use essays from other sources because I felt those authors had experienced similar feelings, difficulties, and joys.

Help from All Over

Reading and writing are the most essential skills that a person can ever learn. In large and civilized countries, they are used on an everyday basis. For me, reading and writing are very valuable and I'm willing to spend money to acquire the skills to read and write. Since English is my second language, I have to face more challenges than those for whom English is their native language. I had a positive experience in America with reading and writing, because I received help when I most needed it from different people. When I came to America eight years ago, I didn't know how to read, write, or even speak English. When I was in fifth grade back in Russia, my father sent me to a Russian school, which taught English as a second language. Although I took English classes then, I did not learn it. With the help of ESL classes, an individual tutor, and some teachers, I was able to learn English, which became very helpful in my life.

The first basic English that I learned was in my English as a Second Language class. ESL classes not only taught me the English language, but also the values and traditions of American culture. ESL classes were the first classes that I took in America. I got into ESL when my parents registered me for fifth grade in Portland. At the beginning, the language itself sounded unusually weird to me, and I couldn't understand anything or anyone. Only with the help of an interpreter was I able to communicate with my teachers. But later on, I started to understand some basic words that I learned in ESL. When I came to America, "I not only wasn't articulate, I wasn't even functional" (Malcolm X 441). Malcolm X had the same difficult time with writing letters from prison to his friends, as stated in his essay "Coming to an Awareness of Language." X would use slang words in his writing, so they didn't state clear meaning. I experienced the same difficulties as he did, so I know what he is saying in his essay. My vocabulary was limited, and if I couldn't express myself clearly then I would use hand gestures to express myself. Learning to speak English was my first goal that I set up to achieve. I enjoyed speaking with my teachers, and they were able to understand me. During the first two years in America, I learned a lot of information about American culture in general. But after about two years, my family decided to move to a new home, so that was the end of my ESL classes. I remember this time in my life because it was my first experience in America that pointed me toward the right direction in improving my language skills.

The second most important positive experience that I had was from my personal tutor. Since we moved to a new home, I had to go to a new school and I had to find myself new friends. It was very difficult for me mentally because I left behind a lot of friends. My school was brand new, so it didn't offer any ESL or other programs to help me. I was the first Russian student that they had ever had in this middle school. After a few days, my teachers realized that I had difficulty following and understanding the material, so my English teacher assigned me a personal tutor. I felt lucky because my tutor came to the school library every day and worked with me from ten o'clock until noon. This tutor was a fifty-eight year old man who was a part-time history teacher. He helped me with my language, reading, writing, and even covered some history. I read to understand books, and I practiced spelling words with my tutor. My language slowly improved when he made me read books, which I didn't like at first, but later on started to enjoy. Like Richard Rodriguez, when I worked on my reading with my tutor, he would "usually [read] biographies of early American presidents" (Rodriguez 405). In the essay "Reading for Success," Richard Rodriguez wrote about encountering a nun who helped him understand that reading was not boring, but that it was fun. Because of that experience he began to like reading, which was unusual in his family. In my family both of my parents like to read, but they only read in Russian. My parents didn't have any formal education here in America, and that is why they still struggle with English. My English started slowly but steadily, and I started to like new information. I noticed that when I worked with an older person I was able to learn more valuable information than from more immature students. I enjoyed working with my tutor because he was an energetic, excited person, not boring as some of my teachers were in the past. That was an excellent year for me because I finished middle school with a GPA of 3.8. I was so proud of myself for my accomplishments. But then suddenly we moved again because my father found a new job, and I had to go to a new school.

My high school teachers gave me the final opportunity to try using English on my own, which prepared me for the real world. When I registered at my new high school I was happy that it offered ESL classes, because I was looking forward to taking them. But when I took the ESL test, I was not allowed to take the class because by then my English was too good, so I had to take a normal class. At that time my English was not as good as native speakers', and my teachers knew that it wasn't my first language, so they didn't grade me hard on my spelling. But I did receive feedback from my teachers about my writ-

ing, which was very helpful. Sometimes I would stay after school to get more help on some subjects that I didn't understand right away. I knew that English was my second language, but sometimes I would still get frustrated that other students could spell better than I could. It felt like I had some kind of barrier that prevented me from improving my spelling. At first, things were difficult to face in my classes without any ESL or tutoring help, but then I slowly started to move ahead in my English. In Frederick Douglass's essay "How I Learned to Read and Write," he explains what he had to go through and the challenges he had to face just to learn to read and write. For me, school in America was challenging too, and like Douglass, "After a long, tedious effort for years, I finally [graduated from high school]" (423). Douglass's challenge was that no one would teach him, but my challenge was that I was learning about a totally new culture and new traditions. After hard work I started to pass all my classes in high school one after another, and I finally graduated. I was an average student with a GPA of 3.4, but finishing high school was not enough for me, so I moved on to a higher education – college.

During my years in school, I learned many valuable lessons and most of them came from older people. I received most help from ESL classes, a personal tutor, and teachers who pointed me toward a positive future. Since already put so much effort into my education, I am not planning to give up on it. I'm willing to do whatever it takes to make something out of my life, like go on to a medical career. But my most important goal is to someday be able to spell any word perfectly – then I will count myself as a real American.

Works Cited

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