



Video Story Transcript

A SECOND LANGUAGE: A TIME TO LAUGH, A TIME TO UNDERSTAND

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<http://www.storyinmotion.com/>

Link to YouTube Video:
<https://youtu.be/yQARtrceR4U>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

My mother came into the house, sweating from downtown, with an envelope. She put the envelope down and said, “I have signed you up to learn English because even though I don’t have much of an education,” she says very simply that, “I heard learning a second language will take you places.” And it was like a clairvoyant moment in her life, and I am like, “Ok!” So I went to class, and it was like this tiny little treasure box that opened in my head because I didn’t know how I would be learning English, but it was so exciting to try these different sounds and learn about culture because as you are learning the language you learn the culture. I learned about England, learned about the US, and trying to say “This” because “this” doesn’t exist in Portuguese. You don’t go “Th,” you know. Usually you have a speech impediment if you go “th” in Portuguese. So those things are very kind of intimidating when you are learning a language. It’s really about playing with sound.

But nothing really prepared me for the cultural experience than full immersion because you are learning how to speak the language and you are learning about the culture, but really being there it’s a whole different animal. For example, in the textbook you learn “it’s raining,” that’s what you learn. You don’t learn “shower,” “we’re going to have showers.” When I heard that, I’m like “we’re going to have showers!?!?”

So, I had a chance to go to Maine 22 years ago. I went on a scholarship to learn mime. How about that? I’m learning English as a second language and I come to the US to learn a silent language—mime. And so I’m learning all these new words: it’s not just “snow,” it’s “sleet,” it’s “we are gonna have snow showers.” It was like, all these different expressions, and then there were all these misunderstandings, cultural

misunderstandings. People thought that I lived in a tree because I come from Brazil. I had all these silly questions like, “Do you have cars in Brazil? Do you have airplanes in Brazil?” I’m like, “No, we don’t have any of this stuff. I canoed all the way to Maine.”

But you can’t judge those questions because people are speaking of... they’re innocent. They are not trying to hurt you. Just like for example, in Brazil, the sandwich. Knowing that America is a sandwich-type of culture in terms of a quick food is the sandwich. The hamburger is the only sandwich we heard about. But I got here, and somebody invited me to go and eat an Italian. I’m like, “Are you a cannibal? You’re going to eat an Italian? What is that all about?” It’s a sandwich!! “Reuben”—another sandwich! You don’t hear these things, unless you sneak into the culture, you know.

And then there was that moment that somebody asked me how I was doing with my host family, I was living with a host family. And I was trying to be very, very good at my English. You learn: you swim, you’re a swimmer. Right? You paint, you’re a painter. So they said, “What do they do?” “Oh, the father is a consultant and the mother, she’s a hooker,” I said innocently. I didn’t know that a hooker was connected with prostitution. I just said, “She’s a hooker,” and my friend said, “No, no, she can’t be a hooker.” I said, “Yeah, she is.” And the more I tried to explain that she was, the more it looked real because I said, “Yeah, she is. She stays home during the day and then twice a week in the evening I stay with the kids, and she goes out, and she is a hooker.” My friends are like, “No, she can’t be a hooker, you misunderstood something.” “No, she hooks rugs.” And she goes, “Oh, we don’t say that, if you hook rugs.”

I started laughing when I understood what she was saying. It was the most hilarious thing, while standing on the sidewalk waiting for the university bus to come and pick me up and learning that new word through that very funny moment. And I got home and I told my host mother what I had said, and she started laughing, and so, that’s how you learn a new language. You take steps, you fail, and you laugh and you learn. You know, I do believe that if everybody took a chance to learn somebody’s language, especially if you have an issue with that culture, go and learn that culture’s language, try at least, and you’re going to take a peek through a window you’ve never looked through before and you’re going to start understanding that culture. And I think that’s what I got from it and that’s what could actually change things in the world, is trying to listen to different cultures’ stories through language.