



Video Story Transcript

America, The Land of Miracles

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOprUIEaaKs>

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.

Hi, my name is Noa Baum but when I was a little girl growing up in Israel, my name was Noa Kohen-Raz. I grew up in Jerusalem where America...America was just about the farthest, most exotic place you could go to, other than Mars. And in the summer, before fifth grade, 1968, my father announced that he was invited to a two year sabbatical at Stanford University in a place called Palo Alto, California. Which is just another complicated way of saying America. We were going to America! America... How can I describe to you...is...it's the land of miracles! It's the place where my mother said everyone had cars and televisions and machines and actually washed your clothes for you and everyone there spoke English...and that's when it hit me.

We were going to start English as a Second Language in fifth grade and I was going to go to fifth grade in America where everybody already spoke English. Suddenly, I wasn't sure I wanted to go at all. But to call my panic, my father gave me a two week crash course in English, which included all the letters A, B, C, D, all the way to Z. And as we flew across that endless ocean, I chanted my entire English vocabulary over and over. "Hello. How do you do? My name is Noa Kohen-Raz. I come from Israel." And armed with this, I entered my first day of school in America, the Land of Miracles.

Well, the first thing that was evident was how strange and different everything was. I mean, my school in Jerusalem was a three story building with corridors and narrow windows and lots of stairways. We had a single little slab of concrete outside and it functioned as gymnastics, assembly court, basketball, soccer, chased the boys field, all in one. Here in America, the school was just one story high. It was shaped like an L and all

the doors were green. And they, they faced an enormous playground, beyond which was an even bigger area filled with grass. I mean, it was bigger than my entire neighborhood in Jerusalem!

And then my mother deposited me in front of one of those green doors, the fifth grade. There was the teacher Mr. Frieburg. He had a bald, shiny head, big round belly and a smile that gave instant meaning to the phrase, "From ear to ear." He said, "Hello!" and I was smitten.

"Hello. How do you do? My name is Noa Kohen-Raz. I come from Israel." He shook my hand.

"How do you do?" And he laughed so hard, the tie was bouncing on his belly. He led me to my desk. He pointed to a piece of tape on the corner, "Name." I knew that, my father showed me. I practiced my name. I wrote it, N-O-A. I'm so proud.

The girl next to me was writing two names. My last name. My last name Kohen-Raz. My father showed me but I never practiced. What am I going to do? What am I gonna...I mean...I mean, even if I knew the words to ask...I mean...how can you ask somebody else how to write your own last name? I mean, I'm in fifth grade. And how much stupider can you get? I wanted to evaporate and die. I prayed for a miracle. And it happened.

All of a sudden, Mr. Freiberg said my name out loud, "Noa Kohen-Raz" and somebody asked, "Uh?" And he turned around and he wrote it on the board. N-O-A, K-O-H-E-N, dash, R-A-Z! All I had to do was copy it and I was saved.

Another miracle happened when the bell rang. Recess. Everyone was rushing to me. I was never so popular in my life. I was standing in the middle of a circle, surrounded by pushing eyes and bodies and they all had thousands of questions. (*Sounds of gibberish talking.*) What could I do? I answered with all of my English. "How do you do? My name is Noa Kohen-Raz. I come from Israel." But there was more. (*Sounds of gibberish talking.*) "Yes," and they laughed. (*Sounds of gibberish talking.*) "Yes," and they laughed again. This a miracle. I was funny in English. And to this day I have no idea what it was I said yes to.

But right after the bell rang, Mr. Freiburg wrote a word on the board, C-H-O-R-U-S, and then he clapped his hands, "Chorus!" And everybody said, "Yeah!" And they were all putting their bags... in their bags and everybody was banging their desks and rushing to the door and I figured we're going somewhere. And so, I to... put my books in my bag and I, and I, and I got up to go to the door. By then everybody was gone and Mr Freiberg was standing there with his big smile, "Chorus," and pointing out and I said, (*nods head*), and I started going out to the playground...and, and there was nobody there. They all disappeared so fast. I was facing an endless line of identical green doors. My entire class disappeared behind one of them but which one? And what was that word? Cha-What is it? The only logical conclusion I could come to was that it was some sort of a secret club only for Americans. I mean, why else would they run so fast and leave me behind? Because I'm not invited. And it was quiet. You know, the way it is after the bell rings and everybody knows where this was to be except me. And there was a lump in my throat swelling to the point of pain and... I just decided to go home.

Well, the sixth grade guards stopped me at the corner and they started to talk, and they took me by the hand, and they started to lead me back to the line of green doors. And I wanted to say I don't want to go to this place that had things only for Americans and I'm not invited. But even if I had the words by then, I couldn't talk; I was just crying. But they kept walking and then they opened one of the green doors. And there they were, my entire class standing around a big piano. An Asian looking teacher was sitting there reading names. She turned to me, "What's your name?"

"My name is Noa Kohen-Raz. I come from Israel."

“Oh, Israel! Chanukah!” And she waves her hand in the air and they all start to sing in Hebrew! *Shalom, chaverim. Shalom, chaverim. Shalom. Shalom.*

To be honest...they had a lot of work to do on their Hebrew. But for me that moment qualifies as a miracle. My third miracle in America, The Land of Miracles.