

VOICES

Volunteer English Program Student Magazine

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Spring Has Sprung!

After a long, cold winter, spring is finally here! It is a time to enjoy longer, warmer days, the beauty of nature emerging from dormancy, and our own personal renewal as we work toward new possibilities.

In this issue of Voices, students share their experiences learning English and adjusting to life in the U.S. We hope you enjoy reading about their successes. Our thanks go out to all students continuing the journey to reach your goals with your VEP tutors!

Note from the Editors: To preserve the writers' tone and voice in their pieces, changes were made only to improve clarity and formatting.

NEVER YET
was there a
springtime,
when the buds
forgot to
bloom.

-Margaret Elizabeth Sangster



"Before VEP, I had difficulty with (words) that made it hard for other people to understand me. It has helped my wife and me a lot, in our jobs and in our general lives. This has changed our lives a lot."

-Edilson Almeida



Mariana's Story



My name is Mariana. I'm 24 years old, and I am from Brazil. I was born in a small city, Torres, in the South of Brazil, colonized by Germans and Italians. My family is a mix of Germans and Brazilians. My first language is Portuguese.

When I was seventeen years old, I needed to move to a big city, Porto Alegre, to study. I studied Law at Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, a University in South Brazil. Also, I got married and moved to the seventh most populated city in the world, Sao Paulo. Sao Paulo is in the southeast region of Brazil.

When I was finishing my degree, my husband was transferred to Pennsylvania. I needed to choose between finishing my degree or learning everything again; language, culture, etc. I choose the new!

We moved in October, 2016. My first day in the USA was hard because I didn't know how to speak English. I couldn't say "hi" or just "how are you?" I was feeling badly because I am a talkative person and didn't know how to communicate.

For months I stayed inside my house, because I was afraid to speak. Everyday, I studied by myself but I couldn't understand when someone talked to me. One day, I was looking on the web for English classes and found VEP.

In my first class, I was so nervous I couldn't talk. My teacher Gary was an amazing person. He had patience with me. He explained everything to me like the alphabet sounds, the accent, the meaning of words.

In my first month of classes, I could understand more than I could speak. As classes went on, my teacher made me feel comfortable enough to start speaking. When I realized I was beginning to speak English, I began to watch movies, talk with my neighbors, and go to the supermarket by myself.

Today, I can talk for hours with my teacher Gary. Every class, I learn new words, new pronunciations, new stories. Nowadays, I'm studying to complete my goals: go back to University, find a job, and build my new life here.



Mirsa's Interview

Mirsa has been a VEP student for a year and a half. She grew up in Guatemala. When she came to America, she learned from a friend at her church about the VEP program. Her tutor asked her questions and recorded her answers. Then they wrote down what she said and sent it to us.



What is something that you would like everyone to know about Guatemala?

In Guatemala, it is possible to have a garden all year long. There are always good, fresh vegetables to cook with from your own yard. I think that our food is very healthy because we have fresh vegetables and fruit. There is also fresh fish and chicken to eat.

How have your language skills changed since you started at VEP?

I can understand other people speaking English much better, but speaking it myself is still very hard. My daughter is in preschool now and I can understand her teachers who only speak English. I think that they can understand me too. Sometimes I have a harder time with doctors. I don't understand them all of the time and I know that they don't understand me too. I have one doctor who has a translator. But she is not always there when I have an appointment. It is hard.

How has your life changed since you started studying English?

I had the opportunity to work this year. My one boss was from Brazil. She spoke Portuguese. We had some Spanish, some English and some Portuguese. It was crazy. Somehow we made it work. We had to use different ways to make each other understand. My boss would say, "Too much Spanish! Too much Spanish!" when I spoke too fast. I think that it made both of us speak better English because our customers spoke English.

What do you hope to improve in your second year of studying English?

My four-year-old daughter tells me that my English is not too good! I want to get better at understanding English. That is the most important thing for me. Most people speak too fast for me to understand it all. I want to be able to understand what my daughter did at preschool. I am expecting another daughter in May and we are very excited. It is very important for me to keep studying English.



Alex Ihnatsiuk, VEP Student Speaker

Alex Ihnatsiuk was the VEP Student Speaker at the annual **VEP Building the Chester County Community Fundraising Dinner**. Alex and his wife moved from Belarus to West Chester five years ago. His stories about some of the challenges they faced made the audience laugh!

Have you had these experiences?

Going to the city: We had to go into Philadelphia to one of the government buildings. We weren't sure about the parking, so we parked on the street and when we came out we had a parking ticket. **WELCOME TO PHILADELPHIA!**



Buying a car: There was one with over 100,000 miles on it, but the dealer told me it was a piece of junk, so I bought a (car) with 35,000 miles on it. I got credit for the car . . . with a special credit organization . . . at 25% interest!

Keeping their native language: I want to keep knowledge of our native language. But our children want to speak English . . . NO, they want to speak **American!** At school and with friends in the neighborhood everybody is speaking American.

Interviewing for a job: My tutor and I practiced interviewing, both for phone and face-to-face interviews. One of my problems was talking to recruiters. I could tell them a lot about what I knew and my experience . . . but if he or she asked me "how was my weekend" I didn't even know how to respond. At every session after that, my tutor would ask me how my weekend was. I had to explain that to him. That helped!



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SPRING
is nature's way
of saying,
LET'S
PARTY!

-Robin Williams
(comedian, actor)

Contact Us

If you have a story, letter, or poem you would like to submit for the next edition of Voices Magazine, please ask your tutor to contact us!

We'd love to hear about your summer adventures for our next issue!!