

More than English

By Amy Wang

I will never forget the moment I left my specialist's office. That was my first time, in Vancouver, finishing an appointment in English without an interpreter. For me, it was a big challenge. It happened at a time when I had been studying English for less than two months at VCC.

Two months ago, I started to learn English in Level 4 of the ELSA program (English Language Services for Adults) at Vancouver Community College. I didn't see it as a problem, but several days passed, and I found my listening skill was too poor to catch half of what my teacher said in class. I also had a lot of pronunciation problems. It was quite a shock for me. I was so upset and tired on the following days. I wondered if I was in the wrong level, if I needed to change my full-time class to a part-time one, and if I could pass the test in two months. Meanwhile, I had tried to catch up with my class. So the first month was not easy.

In the second month, one day in class I noticed that I could understand my teacher's words better than before. My teacher Mandana pronounced every word so clearly—what I had hoped for. Then my worry diminished, and I could concentrate on what I was learning. From that day, I followed Mandana's directions and advice, and I kept practicing after school day by day. Gradually, I felt better every day. I had no time to worry now. I paid more attention to the stressed words in a sentence when I listened, and I read fluently in meaningful chunks. Mandana said that language learning was a skill. She was right.

My progress in English brought me more self-confidence, so I tried to make this appointment with my doctor on the telephone. I told myself not to worry and focus on listening. I caught the main words, and I was glad the receptionist could also understand me. More importantly, I learned to ask questions politely when I still didn't understand. As a result, I decided to see my doctor without an interpreter. That day the receptionist smiled at me and said my English speaking is good.

After just two months, even though I still can't catch up with my classmates, I have improved a lot. I don't fear when my cell phone rings any longer. I'm not anxious to go shopping in local stores. I like to communicate with people. I hope to have a positive lifestyle. I wouldn't like to go back to the past.

When I look back at the past two months, I suddenly realize when you start to forget what you are worried about, you can do your best about what is ahead. When I immigrated to Vancouver last year, I had lots of questions every day. I didn't dare to talk with the local people, I missed my mother and I couldn't take care of her. I couldn't see my father for the last time before he passed away in China. I often got angry with my husband and my son. In spite of that, I didn't know what I could do. Immigrating to Canada was my own choice; a dream came true after many years. It was really my personal problem. Nobody else could help me solve my problems.

When I started to face my problems, I found many of them were not difficult to solve. I tried to have a good relationship with my son for a long time. It got worse since I never thought that it was my responsibility. I knew it now. When I talked with him more patiently than before, I also noticed his progress every day. He was willing to help me to do the dishes. He was delighted to call me after school every day. He reminded me to drive carefully when it rained. It was easier for us to communicate with each other.

I also paid attention to some little changes around me. For example, one day, one of my neighbours whom I didn't know was very kind and helpful to me. As I was backing my car out of my parking stall in our parkade, she was driving in. She stopped her car under the automatic gate waiting for me and motioned to me to pull out. I appreciated what she did because she not only helped me that moment but also took away my fear of automatic doors. In China I was never used to that kind of door, and usually there was a guard to help us pass through the gate. Here in Canada, every time I went through the automatic gate, I quickly drove away since I was afraid it would fall down to hurt my car. From that day, I didn't worry about that any longer. I learned to help other people that way too.

I was also impressed by other strangers who smiled at me when we passed each other either on the sidewalk or on the road. I had ignored that before, but now I cared about it. I hope I can spread my happiness to others around me.

These experiences matter to me now. My heart is easily touched by the kindness of strangers as well as any improvement of my life. They may be some small things, but for me they are big things. They make me feel peace and joy inside, which guides me what to do every day. I feel like a little girl who is picking up her lost pearls in the sand. I keep them as precious as treasure. I can tell my mom I am really well in Canada.

Several years ago, I heard "Regard bitterness as a blessing", but I didn't understand it. I think I get it now. What I want to share is, "Regard every day as a gift". I expect a different surprise every day. I am grateful for everything that I have experienced. I enjoy passing through every single day. I do not question if I deserve the gift. What I need to do is to get myself ready for the gift.

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