

As I reflect on my early years, a vivid memory stands out, a memory that has played a pivotal role in shaping my life's journey. It was a moment of arrival, marked by the overwhelming sense of being thrown into an unfamiliar world, much like a bird taking its first steps beyond the safety of its nest. In that moment, I found myself surrounded by danger and mystery, with neither friends nor allies to guide me. I was left to fend for myself, navigating through a world that seemed vast and unforgiving, a world that I was ill-prepared to confront. The experience was disorienting, my head spinning as I desperately sought refuge from the chaos that surrounded me. My initial instinct led me to run for the nearest closet, hoping that the other kids wouldn't notice me and tell the teacher, I feared I would get in trouble. As I cowered in that confined space, my heart raced, and I couldn't help but wonder if anyone had seen or heard my disoriented entrance into this strange new world. After what felt like an eternity, I managed to regain my composure, slowly emerging from the shelter of the closet, I ventured outside, the uncertainty of the world unfolding before me. My thoughts were a rushing like a sea of emotions, each wave crashing harshly against the razor sharp rocks on the coast

It was during this moment of uncertainty and transition that a tall figure approached me. It was as though this individual had sensed my confusion and recognized the need for guidance. With a gentle smile and a reassuring touch, the stranger reached out to take the piece of paper I held in my hand, a piece of paper that seemed to be a lifeline in this new and perplexing world. With a comforting hand on my shoulder, the stranger guided me to my designated classroom. As I entered the room, a wave of disappointment washed over me. It was not as inviting as the first place I had encountered upon my arrival. The stark reality hit me; this was where I belonged, a place where I would begin my journey into a new phase of life. I had arrived at a point in my life where I understood many things, but English was not one of them and that I could not understand no matter what they tried to demonstrate. The teacher, tasked with the responsibility of nurturing young minds, offered no assistance in bridging the language barrier that separated me from my peers. There were no provisions or accommodations for students like me who had Limited English Proficiency (LOTE). As such, I was left to navigate the labyrinth of the English language on my own. In a peculiar twist of fate, my classmates began to turn to me for help in communicating with another student who, much like me, grappled with the complexities of the English language. When well-intentioned individuals attempted to assist me, I tried to explain my language abilities, conveying that I could speak Azerbaijani and had a small grasp of Russian. However, my classmates were unfamiliar with the concept of Azerbaijan and could not comprehend the idea of my native language. To them, my words simply translated to, "I can speak Russian."

The only individual in the entire school who could converse in Russian was an elderly lady, known for her stern and uncompromising demeanor. Rather than showing empathy for a confused child, her initial response was far from kind, uttering harsh words that stung like a slap in the face. "Are you stupid? Don't they teach you that wherever you're from?" she remarked, her words cutting through me like a knife. Her comment left me reeling, but little did I know that this would not be the worst part of my educational journey. Throughout the year, the school administration randomly assigned me to the stern old lady to read a book. However, it quickly became apparent that she had no intention of fulfilling her role as a teacher. She never

read the book, nor did she provide translations or explanations of the text. Instead, she simply had me sit there, staring at images and words I could not comprehend, convinced that this was the way to teach someone the English language. Despite the isolation and alienation I experienced during this period, I somehow managed to form friendships with my fellow students. As children, we had an innate ability to find joy and camaraderie even in the absence of a shared language. We knew how to have fun, and even when we couldn't communicate through words, we relied on facial expressions and body language to convey our thoughts and emotions. During moments of mischief, when we chose to goof off instead of diligently completing our assignments, my classmates would whisper a phrase that was foreign to me, yet its meaning was unmistakable: "Quick, pretend you're doing something; the teacher is coming." It was through non-verbal cues that I grasped the urgency of the situation, allowing me to play my part in this unspoken, collaborative charade.

My mother's presence in my life at that time added a layer of complexity to my educational journey. She had been in the United States for twelve years, yet she also grappled with the English language, relying on my older brother for communication and support. However, my brother, a teenager contending with his own set of challenges, often kept my mother in the dark regarding my struggles at school. I was unaware that what was happening to me was fundamentally wrong, and I simply assumed that this was how schools operated in America. I was left to navigate these uncharted waters on my own. As the school year drew to a close, the outcome was a source of enduring embarrassment for me. I had been left back, and the weight of this experience remained with me throughout my academic journey. All my friends had moved on to the second grade, leaving me isolated once more. I admit that it took me some time to learn English, but I also acknowledge that my own behavior played a significant role in My set up, it was still not right what happened to me, but because of what happened I learned a great deal of many things, like to pay attention and focus in school as that is what I thought was the main issue. And it lead me here to this point in my life.