

ABE

Tong Vue

School: The Hubbs Center, St. Paul

Teacher: Carlynn Miller-Gore

Changes in America

I came to America as a Hmong refugee at the age of 18 on February 1980 in Minneapolis, Minnesota with the help of a church who sponsored my mom, my cousin, and me. They also helped pay the rent for my family for four months and they donated used kitchen utensils and canned foods. People also donated used clothes for us, but they did not fit so we rolled the sleeves up and tied them because we didn't have needles and scissors to fix them. The American and Hmong ways of living are very different from each other. It was very difficult living in America, but I learned little by little.

At first, I didn't know where the water and fire were located so a woman from the church named Sue taught us how to use the sink and stove. She took my family to the Owl Food Store and we saw many foods on the shelves and in the refrigerators, but we didn't know which were for people and which were for animals. We had difficulty in knowing the difference between meats so we bought only chicken or bird because of the wings on the body. Rice is an important food in the Hmong community, so we found 50 to 100 pounds of long grain rice at a Vietnamese store, but we couldn't cook them without a steamer.

I couldn't speak English so I couldn't find work. I took the responsibility of taking care of things for my family because we lost everything and had no money. As months passed, I got my first job as a dishwasher at 510 Restaurant in Minneapolis who paid me 270 dollars a month. I also went to school every weekdays and worked in the evening from Friday to Monday. Things became easier because I can read and write and understand what is written and said.

I felt like I was lost and came to the wrong country, but I kept learning and changing and now it's better. I've learned how to do a lot of things. I have adapted to the American lifestyle, but I still do a lot of things I used to do in my homeland such as eating rice. In coming to America, I've found that it takes time and effort to learn new things, but in the end it's also fun.

Elementary

Mor Yang

School: HOPE Community Academy, St. Paul

Teacher: Hannah Allia

My life in Thailand and American

I will be writing about my life in Thailand and in the America. It is important because other people should know how my life has been when I was in Thailand and how I come to America. This can also help other people to know how hard it is for the people that live in Thailand.

My life in Thailand was hard for me because my mom and dad they didn't have enough money to buy food and raise our family. So my sister, brother, and me we went farming to get more money to buy foods. It was so tiring and so hot that my skin was turned into black. We went farming every day for food and money. In Thailand my family we ate rice with pepper and ginger but sometime we ate rice with water. My family we come to the U.S.A. because one of my big brother and two of my sisters, they come to the U.S.A. they call back to us and day that life in the U.S.A. is better than in Thailand. That why we leave Thailand and come to America.

Lives in the U.S.A. and in Thailand are different a lot. For example, houses in the U.S.A were made of cement and houses in Thailand were made of wood. The clothes U.S.A. were made so beautiful but the clothes in Thailand does not that beautiful. The things we use in the U.S.A. were different because it made our life easier but the things that are in Thailand didn't make our life easier.

Our Hmong culture is that long, long back all the Hmong people lived in china but the Chinese people didn't like Hmong people so they force the Hmong people to get out of the country. The Hmong didn't want to go so they change their last name to Yang, Lee, Vue, Xiong, Vang, Lor, and other last name so the Chinese couldn't know who they are. The Hmong people also change a litter of their language so the Chinese couldn't know that they are saying. Some of the Hmong people were moving to other places. Now, some people were in the U.S.A., Thailand, and some still in china. So that is why now Hmong people have a lot of last names.

It is important for other people or culture to learn about my life or Hmong culture because they could learn a lot of thing that they did not know. It's also important to learn or to know about my culture because people could learn a culture from me or they could how hard it was in Thailand. They could know how Hmong people lived and ate in Thailand. That why it is important for people to know about my culture.

Secondary

Ekaterina Dahl

School: Shakopee Senior High School

Teacher: Autumn Lee

My New Life

Life has not been easy for me. I was born in Russia, on September 1992. My parents were both 18 at a time. I have a sister who is still in Russia. We lived very poorly often having nothing to eat due to our parents drinking. There were five people in the house. In school people were putting me down because I was poor. It was hard being in the orphanage and separated from my sister, but I was eventually adopted, and I have dreams about helping kids like me.

When I was in the orphanage, I went to public school. I felt that I was not smart enough. I wanted to show them that I was just as capable of having a good life and education as they were. I wanted to be rich like others, but it wasn't in the plans for me. I didn't have an opportunity to pay for college, and have a good job. I knew that being in the condition I was in I didn't have a change to help my family, or change the community.

I was adopted by a family in America in Minnesota in 2005. Things were fine then, I was learning English very fast, and my grades were good in 7th grade. But then my life was getting worse. I was constantly pressured into learning way too much! All I did was study all the time. I didn't have a life outside my room, I grew apart from my family. It was so bad. It was turning abusive. I switched into a different family. Now I live with a Russian family, they have a low income, but they are still kind to me, and trying to provide all the things I need for school.

I knew that I couldn't go to a good college, and pay for all the things that I needed to survive. My goal is not only to survive but to help people and especially kids like me. I want to have a good life. And be able to get a job.

My goal in life is to help my family, but I need to have money to do that. I need a good education in order to change people's lives. I want to help kinds across the world who are having troubles with their families, or finding a family, or maybe money, and school. I want to make a difference in the community by helping anyway I can. I want to defend the rights of children. Give people a better understanding of life and the things we need to do in order to be successful in it. I want to give people something that I didn't have. Give them a chance at something will use for life.

Post-secondary

Kyung Joo Cha

School: Winona State University English Language Center

Teacher: Conan Kmiecik

My Language Challenge in America

I was so excited spring break was coming. I planned to visit my uncle in New York. I already had reserved my round trip flight tickets through Expedia.com and I checked them. However, I found there were two same tickets! I tried to contact Expedia.com, but there was only a phone number. Honestly, I was afraid to call native speakers, so I wanted to contact them by e-mail. In spite of my wish, there was no way. I decided to call.

“Hi, welcome to Expedia.com. What are you calling about? New reservation or existing itineraries?”

“Existing itineraries.”

“Sorry, I missed what you said. Say existing itineraries, otherwise say new.”

It was already three times. I tried over and over, but the answer was same. I did my best to pronounce like him, but it was useless. Finally, I connected with a clerk, not just a voice. I explained my problem and thought t my problem would be solved soon. As soon as I was relieved, the phone was dead. I was embarrassed, but there was nothing but call again. The same situation happened.

I was sick of repeating the same word, but I had to keep going. A few minutes later, I connected with Ben. He explained what was wrong with my tickets and what I could do if I wanted to cancel my tickets. He didn't speak fast, but I couldn't understand what he said. I already had asked him to repeat several times, so I couldn't ask same thing again.

I said to him. “I'm sorry. You explained to me very kindly. But I'm a foreigner so I can't understand well. So, I want to contact you by email. Is it possible?”

“Sorry but I can't, because you should cancel your flight only by a phone call. It's our policy,” he answered.

I wanted to cry. I hated myself. Why was I not good at English? And why did I make a mistake? It was 3:55 pm. I had to go out to meet my conversation partner. I went out helplessly. When we met, she asked me what was wrong and I explained the situation.

After listening, she called Expedia.com instead of me, and talked to Ben. After finishing calling, she said to me that I had two options: one is to cancel the ticket, paying \$75 cancelation fee; another one was to keep the ticket for a year. I choose the first one, and she conveyed my choice and Ben handled it. Thanks to my conversation partner, Nicole, and Expedia.com clerk, Ben, I solved my

problem. I thought I could have a good night from that moment. Even though I solved it, I had another thing to do. I sent an e-mail to reserve a shuttle to the La Crosse airport and I got an answer: "If you want to use the shuttle, you should reserve by phone with your flight information."

Call again? Oh my god!