

A Challenge in Life

One of the toughest challenges in life was moving from my homeland, Chilapa de Alvarez, Guerrero, Mexico, with my family to the United States. I was an eleven-year-old girl who had to leave some of the most valuable things in life: family, memories of childhood, my culture. We had to emigrate to the United States. We had to run away from our hometown that had turned into a bloody, violent, crime-filled place where drug cartels were kidnapping, raping, stealing, and killing innocent people. It was difficult for me to move to a different country and leave everything behind, to start fresh with a new community, culture, environment, values, traditions, food. I encountered discrimination, injustice, and racism, but of all the challenges I encountered, the language barrier was one of the most difficult.

My family and I arrived from Mexico in Clinton, North Carolina in October 2015, where I began to familiarize myself with the new culture, society, beliefs, and education. The first day of school started with a "Welcome to school!" from the Principle. I was muted, frightened, and anxious because I didn't understand what she was saying. She spoke to me in a language I had never known. At that moment I realized that school, and just living here, was going to be tough. I couldn't engage in conversations, learn other people's backgrounds, share ideas, or ask for help. Filling out important paperwork and learning from people in the community felt impossible. I attended school in Clinton for about three months, and the only thing I remember doing was crying and feeling anxious about not understanding my classes and feeling so alone. The saddest thing was that I was being bullied by my own race because I didn't know the language, and didn't have the support to excel in my classes. Thankfully, after three months we moved out of the town to Bend, Oregon.

I arrived in Oregon in January 2015. After facing a huge struggle with language, discrimination, and racism, it was a relief when I began my 7th grade year and immediately felt more welcomed. The school provided my family with an interpreter and put me into the English Language Learners program to start studying English. This inspired me to learn the language. Since then, I realized that I had to make every effort in order to be successful and engage with the opportunities this country has to offer. It was a hard transition. The first year of school I had failing grades, but by the time I started 8th grade, I was learning more and improved daily, so I was able to end middle school with a 3.6 GPA. I made a commitment to myself to target higher goals in high school. I began taking extra lessons online, viewing videos, watching movies, listening to music, and engaging more with teachers and classmates. My freshmen year I took the English Language Proficiency Assessment exam and failed. So, I started focusing harder on my language skills because I knew I would retake the exam again in a year, and I would also be taking the STAndards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP), which would evaluate my language proficiency skills on the basis of national standards in English and Spanish. When I started my sophomore year, I got the news that I had achieved the biliteracy seal, and I was excited to see all my language improvements that year. I also took English Language Proficiency Assessment 21st Century (ELPA21) and met the requirements. Finally, after 4 years of hardship, I was proficient in the English language.

It was difficult to achieve my goal of overcoming the language barrier; however, hard work pays off. I discovered the real potential that I see in myself when I didn't give up. Instead of giving up, I had to conquer obstacles and achieve my goal of speaking English. Now I'm bilingual, and I'm very proud of that. I'm going to graduate high school with an Honors Diploma. I took advanced placement courses. I served the community, using my ability to communicate in both languages, Spanish and English. I support peers who also face

the difficulties which I have faced. I'm extremely grateful for the valuable opportunity to become a bilingual student. I have gained a deeper understanding of people's different perspectives on life, and have figured out how to engage, and stand for my rights. I am excited to pursue a higher education in Elementary Education, and be the support for our future generations.