

They Called Me Stupid So I Read More

Elizabeth F. Raygoza

In 2004, I was hired at a company called Phillips Plastics in New Richmond, Wisconsin. Even though I didn't speak fluent English, I somehow got hired, and I was happy! It was my very first job here in America.

My position was to collect and count plastic pieces and pack them into boxes and then print

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out labels from a computer and stick each one on the finished box. The first day, my supervisor, Cassandra, showed me how to print labels out of the computer. By the second day, I had already forgot-

ten all of the steps for label printing. I was afraid to touch the computer keyboard. There were so many keys, and it looked so confusing.

When I asked her for help, she was not happy at all! She shook her head and said, "You are one

STUPID Mexican." You should go back to where you came from." I felt so embarrassed! I wanted to sink down into the concrete floor or run away and never come back. But it took a long time to find this job, and I needed to keep it.

After that, everybody started to make jokes about me. They called me names like "Peso," "Greasy Mexy," and "Shorty." While working at Phillips, I literally never heard anybody call me by my real name. My co-workers made life hard for me in other ways too. They would hide my stuff. They would turn my plastic injector off. I was constantly in trouble! It was a nightmare (even though I wasn't sleeping). After all of this trouble, I realized that they were being racists towards me.

At lunch time, I didn't talk to anybody because I was afraid of using my poor English. To avoid having people talk to me, I grabbed the newspaper, covered my face, and pretended that I was busy reading. I would check the clock a thousand times. Every day, I wanted time to fly and for the shift to be over as quickly as possible.

Eventually, I forced myself to learn as many English words as I could by talking to people whom I trusted. One day, I stopped to think for a minute about what Cassandra had said to me. Then I came



What Would You Do...



...if people called you racist names?
(Or if you heard someone else being called a racist name?)

"Wait a minute!" I thought to myself. "I am not stupid! I just don't speak English!"

up with a conclusion: "Wait a minute!" I thought to myself. "I am not stupid! I just don't speak English!"

I then made a commitment to memorize as many English words as I could, and I knew that my brain was the only thing that would save me from that horrid nightmare I was living in.

I have learned how to manage the ignorance of others by reminding myself that I am a human being, and I have the same rights as others.

Living in America has been a big challenge for me, partly because I am not fluent in English, and partly because I feel alone in this country. I miss all my family that I haven't seen in 14 years. None-

theless, racism and discrimination have made a stronger woman out of me. I have learned how to manage the ignorance of others by reminding myself that I am a human being, and I have the same rights as others.

Not everyone was so hurtful, so I decided to take the advice of many kinder Americans and improve my English by reading more. One article that caught my attention was on the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Reading and understanding this wonderful article only strengthened my belief that I could be equal too! I made a commitment to find new ways to become a successful person by continuing with my learning.

There are many other immigrants who have come to this country looking for better opportunities and better education. Many have struggled to survive racism in America. For all those who are suffering out there, you should know that you can do more than you think you can. NEVER GIVE UP! This is the world we live in! Racism and discrimination will persist, but we will persevere.

My name is Elizabeth F. Raygoza, and I'm an ABE and GED student at Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College (WITC) in New Richmond, Wisconsin. I'm a mother of three boys, and my goal is to become a nurse.

Learn These English Words

Look at the list of vocabulary words in bold below and find them in the text. See if you can write a definition based on context clues. Check your work by looking up the word online or in a dictionary.

Literally: _____

Nightmare: _____

Avoid: _____

Conclusion: _____

Nonetheless: _____

Extra Credit

Look up the Equal Rights Amendment and explain briefly what it is:
