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Rushin to Learn English

The room I was put in had one small window. Sunlight was barely able to trickle in. My mind was racing for an explanation. Was it something I said? What did I do? It was only my second week of school, how could I already be in trouble? Did America have unspoken rules that I wasn't familiar with? Maybe I was in this room because I cut Becca in line to go down the slide. Was that it? She definitely told on me. As my dad says, "*невиновен, пока его вина не доказана*". How would I plead my case? Is recess taken away from me? Should I use the "I'm new to the country, I don't know rules" excuse?

The four walls stared back at me as if they could hear my irregular fast heart beat. My eyes craved for a distraction so they fixed on the hundreds of framed rewards on the walls. Meanwhile, the crooked chair from under me gave me another distraction to focus on. I wondered what color the walls were underneath all the unnecessary decor. As an eternity passed, finally a lady walks into the room. With her hair pulled back and professional dress I was well aware she had some type of status here. Her friendly eyes seemed to come in peace. Without a word, she scattered to find a stack of weirdly small paper. I've never seen paper this small. Seems pointless really, how would you draw on such a tiny paper? The lady spoke quickly in an unfamiliar tongue. I've been improving on my *American* language, I promise, but nothing made sense. When Americans rush to speak it becomes difficult to distinguish one word from the

other. Has she ever considered to take a deep breath before each word? Seems like she could use it.

My confused facial expression revealed that I did not process what she was saying. The lady dragged her chair from out behind her wooden desk to right in front of me. *дискомфорт*. Uncomfort. Our knees were centimeters from touching. This seemed very odd, in the movies I watched when kids got in trouble the superior usually is at a desk that separates the student and teacher. We were too close. I could feel a wave of her breath hit my face. Uncomfortable silence was floating between us. The lady smiled and revealed two shiny laminated small papers. One had a yellow happy face while the other had a blue sad face. After a few seconds, which felt longer than usual, she spoke in a rushed American accent. I only caught on to the word, “feeling”. *чувство*. I know this one. I pointed to the blue sad face. She seemed to be disappointed in my answer. I’m missing recess for this, how could she think I actually enjoy being in a half lit room instead of getting fresh air? Suddenly, I realized she was waiting for a response. “Repeat please”, I said. She responded with an obnoxiously slow question, “Which flashcard is feeling happy?”. Again, I pointed at the blue card. No, I was UNhappy. She clearly didn’t understand.

After a few more cards she finally let me go back to recess. But right as I stepped outside her office the bell rang and it was time for class again. *недобросовестный*. Unfair. Unsure of why I had to do that, the rest of my day was a blur. My mission in class was to get by without teachers calling on me. Clearly I didn’t know the answer, therefore I was not raising my hand. Teachers here were different. They called on me even if my hand was not raised. Exposing my lack of knowledge in *American*. How rude.

Coming home and explaining my rough day to my parents was top of my priority. The plan was to make sure they would get as furious as I was for my lack of recess. Instead, they began to explain why I was going to be pulled out of recess everyday. Hold on. Did they just say EVERY DAY? Every day. Every single day. A day without recess was considered the worst day of my life, I couldn't even begin to imagine the rest of the year. And for what? *American* language?

The days continued and I had to be pulled out recess. A group of three of us were told to stay in the room while the rest of our classmates got to cut each other in line for slides. How was this fair? I was missing out on the only fun part of the day. Determined to play outside with my new friends, I had to read sentences upon sentences and dissect the true meaning. The only way to see the sunlight again was to improve on my *American*. With never ending flashcards and worksheets it was difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel. What came naturally for others took me twice as hard to comprehend. Embracing my Russian the biggest struggle. In a place where everyone sounds the same, it was weird to have an accent. My peers would constantly ask questions about my relations to communism. I wasn't even sure what that meant!

It took four excruciating months before I was able to go out for recess with the other kids. Four impatient months. Everyday I was stuck in a room with other kids practicing syllables, nouns, pronunciation. Books that we had to mark adjectives, verbs, or nouns were shoved down our throats. Endless pages stared back at me.

Looking back at this time in my life, it is clear that it was a turning point. My life did not drastically change in middle school, where many of my awkward stages occur, or even high school, when I made major decisions about my future, but instead the first year of school in America. Being the kid that was laughed at because I spoke an unfamiliar tongue was my

defining moment. With that under my belt, my skin grew thicker and work ethic grew stronger. The ability to look back at your struggles and see how you overcame builds confidence. Back to recess was the goal and accomplishing it meant that I was able to feel like I could fit in again. Learning English was one of the hardest challenges but simultaneously brought many opportunities. Ever raised your hand in class and actually understood the question *and* answer? I promise, it's a different experience.

Taking the English that I absorbed at school and teaching my family was one of the most memorable and heartwarming moments. Giving up four months of recess for a boost in confidence was a blessing in disguise. Never again having to sit in a half lit room reading pages of books with confusing sentences was worth it. My English slowly improved day by day. Completely submerging yourself into a new environment is one of the best ways to learn and grow. My mind expanded with new words and vocabulary that only made me better equipped to talk to teachers, raise my hand in class, or even laugh at Becca's jokes.