

Noah Fischer
English 1000, Evaluation III
October 18, 21

El Chico de Aislado (The Boy of Isolation)

Yo prometo lealtad a la bandera de los estados Unidos de America, y a la Republica que representa, una Nación bajo Dios, entera, con libertad y justicia para todos. To some, those words are very clear. It's the Pledge of Allegiance in Spanish. To me, the words sounded like I was watching a movie in which the scene called for a change in linguistics. Unfortunately for me, this movie didn't have subtitles. Standing with my hand over my heart, and reciting the words I had learned phonetically, I knew I was different. I was *el chico de aislado*, the boy of isolation. I recited the words hoping I blended in to my surroundings, like a soldier wearing camouflage, but I only felt like it brought more attention to myself, until I met Fernando.

"Noah, it's time to wake up! We're ready to leave!" my mom said as she gently tapped my shoulder. The more I rubbed my eyes in an attempt to wake up, the more the room became clear to me; the hand prints my cousin and I put on the wall using colored paint, the Super-Man action figure from Burger King that I got stuck inside a lava lamp about a year prior, and all the VHS movies on the shelf that I never watched, but whose colors I still enjoyed reflected what I could remember from my childhood. It seemed like we constantly moved around Texas every time my father got a new job, either living in a trailer, townhouse, and at that point, my grandmother's house on the south side of Arlington, Texas, a suburb of Dallas. This time the move was much farther than to a new town half an hour away. This time, we were leaving Texas for what seemed

like forever, and starting new lives in New Mexico. I had never really heard of New Mexico prior to my father's announcement. It took my mother several weeks to correct me when I naively told people we were leaving the country.

I stepped onto the porch not having any idea of what my life would be like. I felt sad that I was leaving JaVon and Mitchell, my best friends from daycare. My parents didn't seem scared at all, even though we didn't know a single soul out in Albuquerque. We drove for approximately 10 hours that day, only stopping to use the restroom and to grab lunch. When we arrived in our new home, it looked very antithetic to my grandmother's home in Texas. Half the houses in the neighborhood looked like traditional Mexican architecture mixed with Native American art and patterns. When I touched the white, metal door with holes in it, it felt really cold. Although we were only a state over, the whole area felt much colder and emptier. There weren't as many trees swaying in the wind, and very few of our neighbors had grass on their yards. Unlike Texas, there was a very distant presence of mountains in the background behind our homes.

Although I was only four, I could tell my family was different. My neighbors were all darker skinned, and spoke a language I did not understand. For a while, I assumed it was a more complex version of English because my parents spoke to my neighbors in the same manner. The words didn't sound the same, but from time to time I caught some cognates in their speech.

My father eventually caught on that their weird language made me hesitant to speak around people. "It's okay, Noah. Your new friends at your school will understand you, and you will understand them. This is just grown-up talk."

Days went on where we would attend some type of neighborhood party or go to dinner with our new neighbors. My brain would stop paying attention to company when the weird language was being spoken, but occasionally tune back in when my mind could decipher the

words and make sense out of the language I previously was familiar with. When I enrolled in kindergarten, my teacher looked like me. She had strawberry blonde hair, and had very light blue eyes that appeared even lighter in comparison to her fair complexion. We always spoke English in the classroom, and it made me happy that I felt like I could finally contribute all the time like I had done in Texas. Things seemed normal again in school until I had Mr. Smith in the second grade.

Mr. Smith was similar to my kindergarten teacher in the fact that he also looked like me: fair colored skin, and light blue eyes. Mr. Smith must have been new to New Mexico as well, because he also didn't speak the weird language. He wasn't totally immune to it like I was however, because he knew the name of it: Spanish. All of the kids in my classroom spoke Spanish to each other that year. I felt alienated when we had to opportunity to talk while we did simple addition and subtraction worksheets; I couldn't understand anyone. Eventually, my peers started teasing me about my culture. *El gringo*, the white boy, or *copo de nieve*, snowflake, were terms I heard often. I desperately wanted to speak Spanish! It felt like everyday I woke up in a foreign country, and bundled within a blanket of isolation.

I began to reject my heritage and identified with something else. My mother was half white and half black, however, I was born with curly dirty blonde hair, blue eyes, and light skin, much like the most of my father's side of the family. I wanted nothing to do with being Caucasian, and would insist I wasn't white, but I was actually black to my classmates. Regardless of my efforts to disaffiliate myself with my race, it still didn't change the fact that I didn't know how to speak Spanish. I befriended a young boy named Fernando Arres who was not only in my class at school, but was in the after school daycare program with me. Fernando lived a couple blocks away from my mother's house. He wore his hair in spikes, and was able to compete very well at

anything he attempted, whether it was football, basketball, soccer, or dancing. If it involved a ball, or music, Fernando excelled at it. Although he was on the shorter side, he was very charming, and the girls absolutely adored him. Fernando's mom, Mrs. Arres, was fluent in English and Spanish, much like my parents. Because of Mrs. Arres' command of both languages, Fernando was able to communicate with English and Spanish speakers with ease. One time when Fernando and I got in trouble for stirring up a ruckus on the playground, they separated us and questioned Fernando in Spanish so I couldn't object to his retelling of our mishap.

The more time I spent with Fernando's family, the more words and phrases I picked up. I was taught how to ask a question in Spanish when I wanted to know how to translate something.

“¿Fernando, como se dice the apple?”

“La manzana.”

“¿Fernando, como se dice the dog?”

“El perro.”

I would constantly ask Fernando to help me translate any random word I didn't know. In addition to Fernando and his *madre* helping me learn Spanish, we had a sweet little elderly lady come to our class twice a week to teach us Spanish. At first, hearing the gentle voice exclaim, *“Buenos dias, boys and girls!”* I was very reluctant. All it was to me was an hour of being embarrassed and feeling excluded. But after a few months, I was excited to learn and continue to grow as a Spanish speaker. During our class time, I was taught me how to count, say my name, ask if I may use the restroom, and a bunch of other helpful phrases.

The real challenge one evening came when Fernando's dad, Mr. Arres came to pick us up from a dance class one night. Mr. Arres was from Mexico and didn't speak a word of English.

“¿Fernando, dónde vive tu amigo?” said Mr. Arres.

“Noah, tell him where you live. What’s your address?”

I was very nervous, but Fernando looked at me like he knew I could do it. I knew Mr. Arres wouldn’t understand my directions in my native tongue, so I had to finally apply everything I learned over the span of the last few months.

“Senor Arres, vivo en la calle de 63rd. Mi casa’s numero es tres, uno y dos.”

Mr. Arres laughed as I spoke my mangled Spanish, but I think he appreciated the effort I made to communicate with him. I knew that even though my newly learned vernacular was far from perfect, I was happy that I made progress and was learning a valuable skill in my life.

When I moved back to Texas about 5 years later, I was put in the same situation; my neighborhood and school was still prominently Hispanic, but this time I had a much better grasp of the language that sounded like absolute gibberish to me just a few years prior.

As I got older, I continued my Spanish education in high school by reading books, listening to music, and copying my assignments in Spanish. I even went to Costa Rica over the summer for a service project and interacted with all the children I met at the school I volunteered at. Although my command of Spanish isn’t close to my abilities in English, I still actively learn in my spare time. I called Fernando some time last year when I found his house phone number in our old address book.

“Hola, Fernando.”

“Que ha sido un tiempo, amigo.” (It’s been a while, friend)

“Fernando, gracias por enséname” (Thank you for teaching me)

I expressed to Fernando how he helped me feel like I fit in, and without him teaching me the basics of a new language, I would have been miserable at my new school, and my new home. I’m far from bilingual in comparison to Fernando and my former classmates, but learning the

basics not only helped improve my outlook on life, but helped me transition from *el chico de aislado*, the boy of isolation, to, *el chico que habló*, the boy who spoke.