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### Being a Foreign Student

I've encountered many challenges in my life. I've always liked to be stimulated by new adventures; something that could give me more as a life experience. In the summer of 1998, when I was eight years old, I decided to participate in a Alps mountain hike with a bunch of guys much older than me. We trekked through the mountains and to the coast for 186 miles and after fourteen days we finally succeeded. At the end of the trip, I remember I felt awesome, even though while I was walking I felt like giving up many times.

Some years later, when I was thirteen, my cousin and I decided to build a wood house on a tree. After we finished it, we decided to build an extra floor on the top of it, and, after hours of hard work, we actually made it. I remember we worked even when it was raining but we were so willing we couldn't give up. This little wood house was built with walls and a roof so tough you could have even slept inside it at night, if you wanted to.

And then there is my greatest and most important challenge I am still living right now. One year and a few months ago I started to fill out bureaucratic documents to come here to California as a foreign student. I wanted to learn the language because I thought it would be necessary for my future career as a computer scientist. I didn't know how to write or speak and I couldn't even understand anything that people were

saying; sometimes it was very discouraging. At the very beginning I had much trouble, but after all, step-by-step, I'm succeeding pretty well in what I think has become a turning point in my life.

I arrived here in San Diego the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 2008. I still remember every single detail about the first day. The thing I remember the most is when I met my host mother Judy. As soon as I entered inside the house she asked me, "Hi Francesco, great to have you here. Are you hungry? Thirsty? Can I help you somehow?" I was actually really thirsty but my English was so poor that I didn't understand any of the words she said to me, so raising my hand to my mouth I made her notice that I was actually thirsty. We both found this very funny.

At the time, I was worried about one thing, and one thing only: if I would ever be able to speak this hard language, which at the time was giving me so much trouble. I remember I felt lonely in a huge city with many crazy people speaking a weird and incomprehensible language. At the beginning of my experience, I used to go to a language school for foreign students only, called Kaplan Aspect. The first day, I had to take a skill test in order to be placed in one of the classes. Obviously the test came out to be a total mess and being so, I started from one of the lowest class levels.

Every day, during the break time, students from the same country, mostly from Turkey and France, would make a group, starting then to talk to each other in their own language. Even though I had been tempted, I never did it. Even if being hardly understandable most of the time brought me down, I was so focused on learning English that I wouldn't have even let myself be close to someone from my country. Month-by-month my English was getting better and better and my desire to learn never gave me a break. Finally, the academic year finished and the last thing I had to do was to take the same test I took at the beginning of the year and then compare it to the first one. My

English had improved way faster than any other classmate. I was absolutely satisfied with my success.

Kaplan Aspect hasn't been the end of my English challenge. After the graduation, I decided to keep studying here in San Diego: naturally, college would be my next step. To be accepted into the school, I first had to pass an English test for foreign students only recognized as the TOEFL, or the Test Of English as a Foreign Language. I was pretty sure that I would not succeed in it. I had to study many hours every day and I had to take simulation tests every other week to keep track of my improvements. After two months of training, I took the five-hour long test, which was divided into three different parts: speaking, listening, and writing. I had some trouble with the speaking because I used to get very nervous and my mind would become full of pointless thoughts, which would confuse and distract me. In the end, I successfully passed the test that opened the door to American colleges.

In only nine months, from a foreign student who had no English skills at all, I became an eligible student in a college in the United States. When I realized this, I remember I felt that maybe I was going faster than what I thought I could handle, and when I was about to start the college I wasn't sure of what I was doing.

The first semester, I took three classes for a total of twelve units. Just one of these classes was a problem: English 49. I often had to write drafts that were due the day after and the amount of time I had was never enough. Sometimes, I also had to write essays related to lectures or newspaper articles, which was much more challenging than simply writing a paper out of my mind. Through hard work and a considerable amount of help from one of my American friends, I succeeded in earning a B as a final grade.

All of these experiences taught me a significant lesson. Most people know that if you hold on and keep working on something, at some point you will get a result that

somehow reflects the amount of diligence you put in it. This is a simple thing that almost everybody knows. Not as many, though, really count on it to get results. People get what they truthfully want to obtain and if they desire to have something that is not just a stupid caprice or outside of their reality, then most of the time they will get it. I learned to hold on, keep hard, and be strong. This is my secret to reach what I really want.