

## My Privilege: A Tutor's Story

2011 has gotten off to a challenging start for me as a reading tutor. One of my English as a second language students asked if I could help her mother learn to read and write English. My response was that I would like to meet with her and do an evaluation and interview.

Mother and daughter came to the Tri-County Life Learners office early one Friday morning for our first meeting. I have been working with the daughter for the past four years and we have a warm and positive relationship. By the look on her face, I could see how proud she was of her mother wanting to take this step.

From the start of the interview, I was told my newest student had only six years of education in her home country and had very little exposure to English. Regardless of that disadvantage, her desire to start anew was apparent by the look in her eyes and the way she expressed gratitude that I was willing to help her learn.

We have had four sessions together since that interview and we had to start from scratch: the alphabet, consonants, vowels, reading from left to right (directionality), it's okay to use a finger to assist you in keeping your place (one-one matching) as a new reader. Keep in mind the whole time she does not understand anything that I am saying.

I invent new ways to demonstrate what I want her to learn during our sessions. I encourage her to read the words over and over, to sound out the letters of the alphabet clearly, keeping in mind the tongue and mouth must shape around letters and words and make sounds that are new, trying to let her know that what she is doing is very hard and wonderful.

This will be a very challenging year for me and my new learner. I have never been forced by war to leave my country, the country I love, and I have always taken freedom, education, and so many privileges for granted. I think that it is my turn to be the student, to watch and learn from someone growing in her newfound land and, one day, her new language.

Having the ability to express ones needs and desires in the common language of your country and to have the ability to read that language enables one to fully function in society. They are foundation blocks to building a better life. The admiration I hold for my student and all adult students that reach out for help to better their lives is very real.

I spent many days of my childhood with my grandparents who had left Eastern Europe because of war and a desire to build a new life. They too, left behind loved ones they never saw again and traveled to a new home, strange new places, and a new language, needing to find work and make a home for their son (my father). Yes, I feel privileged to have this opportunity to help my new student, indeed I do. We will grow together, in this I am certain.

Joan E. Coats  
Prince Edward Coordinator and Tutor  
January 2011