

The Quest for The Holy Grail



The hardest thing in writing is figuring out how to start. Starting college, this struck me especially hard, seeing my classmates type away on computers while I probably rewrote this intro a dozen times by now. Thankfully, I have come a long way as a writer, constantly learning and growing. This very long journey goes back to when I was in kindergarten.



When I was but a wee little lad, starting my first day of kindergarten, I was already mostly ahead of my classmates. You see, my mother always believed that instead of watching TV you should be reading a book, so while many people were watching Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon, I was reading Dr. Seuss. She was also teaching me her native language, Slovak. Speaking a mixture of Slovak and English at my house was the norm between me and my mom. Well, going into my first day of school was not the best. The other kids did not understand me and my teacher tried her best, but she did not understand me either. I soon realized that it was my language that was getting in my way, so I tried to rid myself of it. Over the years I slowly stopped talking Slovak to my mom, I focused on not mixing the two languages together and spent time transitioning from Slovak grammar to English grammar. By the 3rd Grade I had mostly cut Slovak from my vocabulary, like a heavy sack that was holding me down. Looking back, I greatly regret this since now I can no longer talk to my grandparents fluently, I just try to talk to them using a very limited vocabulary. So, when I read Gloria Anzaldua's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," it opened my eyes when she said "But for a language to remain alive it must be used. By the end of this century English, and not Spanish, will be the mother tongue of most



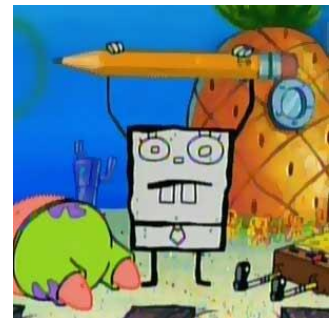
Chicanos and Latinos” (Anzaldua, 39). I then realized that me losing my ability to speak Slovak was not a normal thing to happen, but a plan to slowly rid all non-English languages out of the public schools. Another Author who made this connection is Anjali Pattanayak who had said in “There is One Correct Way of Writing and Speaking” that “In this sense, education, while well intentioned, serves to further the marginalization of certain identities and cultures that do not fit” I not only did I make a connection between this realization and the SAT but only realized that what he described also happened to me without even me knowing about it. Half of the SAT score is entirely English language based, I didn’t think much of it since I was fluent in English, but now I realize that it gatekeeps Spanish speakers away from colleges by having half of their test grade in a language that they don’t mainly speak. Another quote from Anzaldua that I resonated with was “Wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out” (Anzaldua, 34). This made me realize that while unintentional, because of the way public schools are structured, they tried (and succeeded) in having stop speaking a foreign language at school.

Being that I am half Puerto Rican I have always struggled with my ethnic identity. I would ask myself “Am I Slovak? American? Puerto Rican?” never fitting into one group. So, when I read Julie Wan’s *Chinks in My Armor: Reclaiming One’s Voice* I really connected when they said, “I didn’t reclaim and secure my heritage, so the armor became hollow, fragile, and developed chinks.” (Wan, 5). I realized I do not have to pick and choose which ethnicity I am. It is important to embrace all the cultures I am from lest I lose it all, and my armor rusts to nothing. Because I am a mixture of all these distinct cultures, I can embrace the cultural heritage that I feel most connected to. One quote from Wan that really hit home was “I relied so heavily on the armor that I forgot to take it off and converse with my grandmother on the phone from



time to time” (Wan, 5). Not re-learning Slovak and being closer to my grandparents is honestly one of my biggest regrets. One time we went back to Slovakia after spending years scrapping enough money to finally go back, and I met my grandparents face to face. They never showed it (because they are some of the best grandparents alive) but I could tell there was disappointment in their eyes. They would talk to me in fluent Slovak then look in confusion when I would not respond, they would then remember and go back to speaking broken English. I actually started to re-learn some of that lost Slovak language over the course of the month I was there, however once I got back to America it was the same situation over again. I would randomly switch to Slovak sayings or words when talking to my friends, and they would look at me confused and then just move on from the conversation. Once again, I purged Slovak from my language to become “normal”. Because I never bothered to look back after ditching Slovak, I lost an important part of my heritage, and a piece that I hope one day I will recover.

Culture and Identity have been an important part in shaping who I am personally and literately. Losing the ability to speak Slovak and not knowing whether I identify with the Puerto Rican community made me lose some of that personality and culture that makes a good writer great. So instead of talking about me or sharing personal stories about my culture or experiences, I always defaulted to the standard English essay structure. I never left the box and experimented with writing, which caused me to hate it more and more. I never felt that I was really putting any of **my** words into the essays, it felt like my job was to regurgitate whatever prompt they gave me into an essay I did not care about, just a personal Chat-GPT. Now however, I am finally starting to leave that bubble and starting to learn slowly but surely how to inject some personality into my essays.



Works Cited:

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