

Expressing Feelings Verbally

Life is not a storybook, but life unfolds in chapters. Some may be hard to look back on, and some may be heartbreaking. Imagine yourself not being able to speak English but thrown into a classroom with classmates from more than 15 countries and you are the only Japanese. This was me in 2018 when it was time to start a brand-new chapter. The brave ones might be excited, but I certainly was not. I was scared. I remember my legs trembling in front of the class, with twenty-six pairs of eyes looking at me. I introduced myself and spent the first week desperately trying to keep up with the class while trying not to draw attention to myself. By the end of the first week, some students had already settled in, making friends.

“You are a murderer!” The two Korean boys attacked me with these words coming out of their mouths. I still remember this moment vividly. We three were the students from EAL class who were thrown into a class with all native students. As they were both from Korea, they always spoke Korean to each other, and it only took a week for them to find a place to belong in school. Maybe having a classmate from the same country is reassuring, but both of them were aggressive to me. The word “murderer” just kept playing in my mind filled with question marks.

What did I do to them? Where did I make a mistake? I headed home carrying an uncomfortable, foggy feeling.

I dawdled on my way home because I did not want to tell my mother what had happened and add to her worries. However, the next day, these two Koreans said that my father, grandfather, and other people around me were all murderers. It did not stop, and they went on day after day, relentlessly. The more they talked to me, the deeper the wound got. Eventually, I could not stand it anymore and confessed to my mother. Not only did she console me, but she also told me about the war between Japan and Korea in the past. Japan annexed Korea and hundreds of thousands of Japanese settled in the country. Not only very large numbers of Koreans died due to the Japanese occupation of Korea, thousands of Koreans were attacked in Japan too at this time. After this new discovery, I was able to understand the Korean boys' remarks.

I was not a confused girl just standing there anymore. Wobbly English came out of my mouth saying, "Now, I know that you are talking about the war". They seemed surprised, but they acknowledged. I remember myself making an attempt to tell them that the past is the past, the war has nothing to do with me, and how I was hurt by what they had said. The two Korean

boys grasped my feelings and became more careful with their words and actions. The mother of one of the boys is a history teacher and he said it was shocking to hear about his home country losing. I was surprised at myself for being able to explain my own feelings and how that could change somebody's behavior. My life is not a perfect fairytale, so it is not like they apologized sincerely, and we became good friends. However, they stopped bullying me and started acting civilly towards me. This was enough for each of us to have a peaceful school life.

Flipping back through pages, memories pop up and some of them are not easy, some of them are not sweet. However, I personally think memories are not final, they are built upon and developed by subsequent experiences. No matter what the result is, looking back at it later in life, it is always a good memory as it made you who you are. The experience I shared here may not be a “happily-ever-after” story, but I know it is one of the special moments that counts. It taught me how having conversations with others can change things 180 degrees. Just a few words can change both the past and the future and help add greatness to one’s life story. (697 words)