

## ESOL VOICES: Student Spotlight

Olgerta Duni

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*Olgerta Duni was born and grew up in Albania. She moved to the United States four years ago. She lives in Rochester with her husband and three year old son, who is full of energy and fun. In this narrative, Olgerta reminds us of the gifts we can receive from our elders when take the time to listen to their stories.*



*Yuri & Olgerta Duni*

### My Son's Grandfather

Living with my in-laws has taught me so many new things, especially to be patient and enjoy my life as much as possible because nothing lasts forever. My father-in-law is almost 78 years old and left behind so many difficult days, fears, and hopes, but still he feels young, full of energy, and ready for future surprises. He always has the right answer and something very interesting to tell us. He is like a compass where we often find ourselves, so I couldn't find better person for my interview.

I always admired my father-in-law for the wonderful job that he did with his children, and a little shyly I asked him to tell me something about my husband Elton when he had same age like our son Yuri. He smiled at me because he liked my compliment, and he felt little bit embarrassed. He said to me that in his entire life he prayed and worked hard to be a good dad. This was his goal. Even now that the children are adults, he still tries to do his best to help them in any possible way.

He stopped for a minute and stretched his arm out to rub Yuri's head. My son was playing with his toys nice and quiet while we talked,

and sometimes smiled at us. Relaxing on the sofa, my father-in-law started.

"I remember Elton at Yuri's age. Oh my God they are so identical, sometimes it seems that I have returned at the past." He answered with a low voice. He reminded me that my husband was a chubby boy, so he needed to wake up at night every two hours to drink milk. Their house was really cold because the heat wasn't on during the night, so he had to keep the bottle near his chest to stay warm all the night. He had to do that when his wife Violeta worked the third shift for a while. These were difficult times for him because it was not easy to live in communism where nothing was enough even though people worked like robot machines.

He took a deep breath and stopped again. Definitely, I understood him because that time was painful for everybody. With a little hesitation I asked him about Eva, his beloved little daughter. He looked at me straight to my eyes and for one moment I felt guilty. I did wrong when I asked him about his little precious daughter. She passed away a long time ago when she was only three years old and left behind

sorrow and pain for everybody.

At this moment, Yuri laughed out loud and showed us his favorite car that he found among many others. My father-in-law smiled to him and started with trembling voice. "Her big black eyes were fascinating. She was the most beautiful girl that I have ever seen in my entire life. Sometimes I was scared from her beauty." I swallowed like I had rocks in my throat, and I curiously asked him where did they find the strength to survive.

He answered me quietly that the day when she died, he thought that he would die, too. Still today he couldn't understand how they overcame that horrible moment. My in-laws lived in the shade for many years even though they had another child who really needed them and now that he mentioned it to me he felt badly for his older daughter Anila.

As soon as he finished, I asked him about his older daughter with a lighting speed because I really needed to know how she experienced this hard moment. With a great passion, he tried to explain to me how brave she was. Often they were sad with tears in their eyes and she always

found the way to make her parents smile and laugh again. With tears in his eyes, he said to me proudly that they fought all three together, and definitely she was their salvation.

Affected by his words, I asked him when they decided to have another child. When I finished my question, I felt good because he started to smile. He immediately replied that the arrival of Elton in their life was a blessing for their family. He came after ten years, and he told me that he will never forget the happiness that he felt that day. Everybody joined their joy, and all the people that he met congratulated him for his

son's arrival. We started to laugh because both of us knew our city where everybody knew each other. Yuri started to laugh also because he likes to imitate us.

I took Yuri in my arms and I made my last questions for my father-in-law about how he felt when he saw Yuri for the first time. He looked at Yuri and without thinking he put his hand closed to his heart. He took my son from my arms and hugged him tightly. "Together with Yuri came the desire to dream and hope. The day when he was born I understood that my life isn't over yet. I recognize that I have so many things to do with this little

boy because everything that I didn't do with my children, I will do with Yuri. He is my anchor." He smiled and kissed Yuri one more time.

My in-laws have lived in United States for almost three years, and at the end of the month they will move back to our country. I will miss them because we spent a beautiful time together. They are part of my family, and honestly it will be hard to live without them. I learned so much from them, like how to be patient and to have faith that next day will be a better day. Like my son's grandpa said, "After every storm, the sun will shine."



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*ESOL Voices a collection of stories written by ESOL students at Monroe Community College. Each semester, we highlight students from different regions around the world. Look for a new story in the Tribune each month. We hope you will find these stories interesting and inspiring.*

*Katie Leite & Pamela Fornieri, ESOL Program, September 2017*

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