

ESOL VOICES: Student Spotlight

Ilia Ciko

Ilia Ciko is an ESOL student from Albania. In his native country, he studied sculpture and was a rising talent. He came to the United States via the American immigration lottery three and a half years ago, and is here with his family. He hopes to “own” English one day. Reading a story written by a Chinese student triggered Ilia’s own memories of living under communism.



Ilia Ciko, 2018

Departure

“Oh, My God! Again?” I stared at the book to make sure of what I was reading. “No way! No... way!” Unwillingly, these words came out of my mouth. I shut my eyes and my head leaned back as if someone had caused pain in my body.

I left my country and came here to the United States to be in peace. Here, I wanted to avoid many things that I came by every day, making me remember my bitter past, and the deep wounds caused from the craziness of the political system which completely collapsed my family economically and psychologically.

But, heck! What the heck was happening to me? While writing last year at school, my memories took a hold of me in a deep flooding. They threw me through the pains of my life, and once again persecuted me.

And now, as if that wasn’t enough, in this new class some Xiao Mei Sun appears with his “Exodus” story to start the feelings all over again. Meanwhile, a light chuckle came to my face remembering my friends when we shared sarcastic quotes like, “The communism’s ghost has to accompany our people in eternity.” Is this part of it?

At the time, I was 9-10 years old. It was summer vacation. After finishing my drawing course, uneasy and searching the crowd, I was walking in the center of the city. As always, when my eyes didn’t catch the silhouette I was looking for, my legs instinctively would drive me to the street to see her and give her my new drawing.

She was a tall and beautiful girl. With her elegance, she drew others’ attention. I was a little boy and I always liked to meet and speak to new people, especially from my community. Her voice and sweet smile gave me a special pleasure. Our small talk was in our dear native Latin language of the Romans. Often, she would change her path to meet me and to look at my drawings.

One day, right along with her fiancé, while I was digging in my folder, they noticed a colored portrait. She stared at it. Even though I was in my first steps of drawing, it was obvious that I had tried to paint her. I raised my head looking at her for some sign. I was hypnotized by her impressive features. Blushing and somewhat embarrassed, I stuttered, “I’m still not that able.” She stretched

out her hand, ruffled my hair and added, “With what I’m seeing, I’ll have a gift when you come to my wedding. Right?”

I nodded in approval, and as I was backing away, I thought about what she said. But, I was sure that that wasn’t going to happen. Since her father was a political prisoner and her grandfather was executed for political reasons and known as an, “enemy of the people,” it was hard to believe that anyone would attend their wedding. And so, for this reason, I decided to at least try again and give her a new portrait before the wedding day.

Hugging my drawing with my feet leading me to her street, something suddenly changed in the people's movements around me.

“Again! Again, a deportation!” They were telling each other and chasing after some cars. The noise of an open-tipper truck of the Russian type and a police car of the same type, made me stop at the corner of the road. Passing right in front of my face, they stopped near her house. Some policemen and other people known to us as the governments’ servile, got out of the cars. They

kicked and broke down the outside door of the house. Then, one after another, they went into the home yelling, "Get out! Get out, all of you! Quick! Quick! It's a deportation!"

Screams and cries abruptly exploded in the air. Terrified women and children came out of the house. Among them was an old man. He tried to protect the kids from the men who were causing the fight.

After a while, I stopped breathing. From afar I caught a glimpse of blonde hair. It was her. Opposed to boarding the car, she was forcefully dragged by two men. Crying out, her screaming reached my ears, "What did we do!? What did we do!?" A third man snatched the girl by the foot and threw her in the truck. The air unfolded her dress and revealed her white legs.

A "wow" went through the crowds. "You, bourgeois! You need to get an

education from the working and peasant class! Shut up, and don't move from there! Garbage!" One of them loudly threatened. So, thrown over the stuff, horrified and humiliated, she grabbed the bottom of the dress, covered her legs, and sobbing, she hid her face.

I tried to find her fiancé, but he was nowhere to be found. Good thing he wasn't. Better for him to not see this scene. A cluster of things, clothes, and humans quickly piled up on the truck. Then, "as at a wedding", honking their horns to go through the crowd, they disappeared to an unknown direction.

With their slow steps, the crowd got moving, and I felt as if I was in the world of death hearing their whispers, "My God! Poor people! Children! Poor girls! No! Yes! They... bourgeois! They... good people! They belong to the enemies! They deserve

this exile! Human! Inhuman! Fair! Unfair! Government! Revolution! Communist Party! Dictatorship of the proletariat!" Pause. "It's a deportation!" Pause again.

I was frozen when someone leaned over me. He picked up my folder from the ground and stretched it out to return it to me.

Shocked from what I had seen, I began to move my frozen body. I turned my head and looked straight at her home. Across the windows, I saw the emptiness of the house. Stripped of everything, it looked like an abandoned one.

A feeling of disappointment for life knocked into my brain for the first time. Distracted, my hands opened the folder. Seeing the portrait, a terrible thought made me feel thrill and cry. I didn't want to believe it, but I was sure. I would never see her sweet smile again.

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, May 2018
