

MY LANGUAGE JOURNEY

Season 2, episode 13

Like many people in the United States, I did not have the opportunity to take language classes at school until I was 14. In my school, there were only two options: Spanish or German. I decided to take Spanish because I believed, at 14 years old, that it was a more attractive language than German, a more romantic language.

That first year of Spanish was not easy. I had to memorize a lot of information. I had lists of vocabulary and verb conjugations. I didn't know how to put information in context. Up to that point, school was easy for me. Spanish was my first challenging class and it wasn't a complete failure, but I did not do well.

Even though I didn't understand much Spanish, I did like the class. I liked the videos we watched about culture. I liked learning about food. Above all, I liked the music we listened to.

I decided to continue my Spanish studies and I enrolled in the second year. I had a different teacher my second year. It was still a lot of grammar and vocabulary. I had a lot of homework for the class. I distinctly remember that for each question in the book I had to copy the question into my notebook in Spanish, translate the question to English, answer the question in Spanish and translate my answer to English.

While we worked on the grammar and vocabulary practices, my teacher, Mr. Franklin, took out his guitar and sang to us. He liked singing songs by the Eagles, like "Desperado". The work of copying and translating was less terrible with the live music. And that is one of my favorite memories of that class.

During my second year of Spanish, I went with the school choir to New York. There I had an experience that impacted me. We visited the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island. Ellis Island is an important place in American History as it is where many immigrants arrived to the United States. In those two places, there were people from all over the world. I am from a small town in northern Minnesota. We had a few foreign exchange students, but by visiting these landmarks and seeing all those people and hearing all those languages, I realized just how big the world really is. I heard several languages and I thought it was so cool. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to speak and understand more than just English.

There was another girl in the choir that was in my Spanish class. She and I tried to speak Spanish to be "cool" like the tourists that spoke other languages. In that moment, I decided that I was going to take another year of Spanish.

In my third year, all the vocabulary and grammar from the first two years began to make sense in my mind for one reason: stories. In my third year of Spanish we read, and we read a lot. We read short stories and novels like a simplified version of "Lazarillo de Tormes". As I read, I understood all the words and verb formations I hadn't understood before.

I discovered a love for Spanish. I actually wanted to study. I bought CD's of Ricky Martin and Shakira (it was the 90's) and I listened to them all the time, dancing and singing in my bedroom. We had foreign exchange students from Spain and Colombia that year in school. I practiced my Spanish with them when possible and I learned a lot from those conversations.

In class my fourth year, we watched more movies and we studied the Pre-columbian cultures of the Americas. We played Scrabble in Spanish and we memorized poems. During that year I decided that I was going to study Spanish in college to become a teacher.

When I was eighteen years old, I went to Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota to study Spanish and theater. I took classes on grammar, literature, cinema, and translation.

During my studies, in 2002, I went to Spain to spend a semester. I attended the University of Navarra in Pamplona because they had an exchange program with Concordia.

I made a lot of friends in Spain and I took classes on literature, geography, history and grammar. I participated in events at the university and I went on trips with my new friends. I practiced all the time and I fell in love with Spanish even more. I even visited one of those foreign exchange students that helped me so much in high school.

Living in Spain was a great experience. I lived with a lovely family. The mom was from Valencia and she prepared the best paella. The dad watched soccer games at night. I would watch with him. I especially liked the team from Galicia because their goalie was very good looking!

I returned to the United States determined to continue with Spanish. I had excellent professors at the college that came from various countries, including Paraguay, Chile, Mexico, Spain, Peru and Minnesota. When I graduated from college, I found a job and I started teaching.

In 2014, I decided to return to my studies and get my masters, or postgraduate degree, in Spanish education. My children were three years old and two months old

when I started my first on-line class, but I worked hard and finished the program in two years.

As part of my masters degree, I spent two weeks in classes in Costa Rica. I also studied more about the political history of Latin America and Hispanic cinema.

My Spanish journey has not ended. I continue studying Spanish all the time. I listen to music, watch programs, read, and speak in Spanish every day. Sometimes I forget the intricacies of some grammar rules and I need to research and practice a little.

Spanish has been part of my life for over 25 years now. I am thankful that I began my Spanish journey and that I decided to be a teacher. I can't imagine my life any other way. Being bilingual has opened doors. It has brought friendships that I wouldn't have without Spanish. Learning a language gives me the opportunity to share this journey with you all and share this desire to learn and communicate with the world. And I am thankful for that every day.

Not every language journey is the same, but I hope that my experience learning Spanish can help or inspire you along your way to learning English. And I am honored to be a part of that journey.



You can find this and more stories at smalltownspanishteacher.com *This story is an original work by Camilla Given. Any resemblance to stories by other authors is purely coincidental, unless otherwise noted.*