



BROOKLYN_BORN

 Change Banner Image

154,898
SparkPoints



-  Info
-  Photos
-  Feed
-  Blogs
-  Awards
- More 

Daddy, What are they Talking About?

Tuesday, February 09, 2021



I don't actually remember asking that question. I was only 3 years old, but my Dad told me about it years later. It seems I never wanted to go to visit our relatives in PA.

The problem was that when we traveled on weekends and for vacations from Brooklyn to visit family in my parents' hometown, suddenly I was in a different world. Since my immigrant grandparents didn't speak much English, the conversation around me was unintelligible. I did not know why and I hated it.

Eventually Dad explained to me about different languages.
THAT I do remember.
I was shocked. "You mean they use different words for everything?"

Thus began my interest in language.
I would ask "what's this?" and "what's this?"
We were sitting at the kitchen table for that first conversation.

You always remember your child's first word, right?
Turns out my first non English word was "tablecloth" because that's what I first pointed at. (staltiesė in Lithuanian & obrus in Slovak)

Since my grandparents came from 2 different countries, it became quite a game.
Children are like sponges. They can learn languages much easier than adults.
Just like weight loss, it becomes more difficult with age.

In high school I studied Latin and Spanish and even one semester of Russian in a "club" setting. Spanish was easy compared to Latin and Russian. It used the same alphabet as English and the nouns & adjectives didn't change because of their position in the sentence.

During the cold war interest in Russian was suspect, just as my Slovak relatives later told me about interest in English in school behind the iron curtain. It also helped me understand why so many in my 2 ethnic groups changed their names and forgot their heritage. People did not distinguish between those who fled dictatorships and those who supported them.

My cousin decided we were "Austrian" since that was the country on Grandma's documents. Slovakia was part of the Austria-Hungarian empire before WWI.
Think "The Sound of Music" vs. some poor farmer on a soviet era collective farm.
Sounds much better.

Another friend after cringing at one too many Polack "jokes" decided to tell people she was "Swiss." LOL
Guess nobody is mad at Switzerland.

The grammar of Slovak and Lithuanian is way too complicated for me to ever speak well. Writing is easier since I have time to think. Still, I like being able to talk to people when we travel off the regular tourist

 [Add a Blog Entry](#)

See Today's Featured Member Blog Posts

More Blogs by BROOKLYN_BORN

[Avoiding Our Wedding Anniversary - 6/4/2021](#)

[Multitasking for Safety – Plus Remembrance and Reflection - 6/1/2021](#)

[Taps Across America – The National Moment of Remembrance - Monday 5/31/21 3PM - 5/30/2021](#)

[G-R-A-D-U-A-L spells "ME" - 5/28/2021](#)

[View All >](#)

routes. They understand me and if I ask them to speak slowly, I understand them as well.

During one of our university courses in Bratislava I was interviewed by a radio station and introduced as “A 70 year old American woman speaking Slovak with an Eastern accent.” I had an eastern Slovak accent because that’s what I heard as a child.

Imagine a French person coming to the USA and addressing you as “y’all”

So Joe and I intend to continue our language study while living as hermits in the hope we will be able to travel again safely.

My only regret is that I did not make more of an effort when I was younger. Wow, that’s the same thing I say about my delayed attempt to lose weight. It’s never too late, but the sooner the better.

If I hadn’t learned to speak to Grandma Katarina,



I would not have had the confidence to seek out my roots and meet my cousins.

Like this group in Slovakia in 2008



However, I do understand why so many needed to deny their heritage.

This cartoon from 1903 expressed a common attitude at the time, The text reads “The High Tide of Immigration, A National Menace” “Riff Raff Immigration, Danger to American Ideals and Institutions”



[Edit Blog Entry](#) | [Delete Blog Entry](#)

Share This Post With Others

[Report Inappropriate Blog](#)

Member Comments About This Blog Post



TOMATOCAFEGAL

Polish, German, And so yummy foods.
108 days ago



POLSKARENIA

Obrus is tablecloth in Polish too... I find that knowing Polish, I can understand a lot of Slovak and Ukrainian speech and some Hungarian when reading. What a rich cultural heritage you have.
114 days ago



WANT2BTRIM

Good for you
114 days ago



WHITECAT19

Wow! What a great heritage, and what a wonderful blog. Thank you for sharing.



114 days ago



INCH_BY_INCH



114 days ago



GINA180847

I know what you are speaking of. I was born in Germany in 1947 and when I came to Canada,

I suggested we say that we were from Holland.



115 days ago



ALICIA363

I love it! So wonderful you can use your language learning!
115 days ago



JUNETTA2002

Thanks for sharing
115 days ago



RKOTTEK

interesting
115 days ago



CHERIRIDDELL

This is an absolutely fascinating blog ,I know that once you learn one other language becoming bilingual it opens neural pathways in the brain and other languages come more easily but some people do have a facility for language.I find your learning of a difficult language to be a feather in your cap,many people do not attempt such learning . I found that fact that you reflect your Grandmother's accent amusing as I am a parrot reflecting where I lived .I have a Black Forest accent when I speak German and in French I can easily switch between Quebecois and Parisian and even Alsace-Lorraine.My linguistics professors found me an interesting subject because I could so easily adapt to whom I was speaking to. I suspect you do yourself a disservice you will speak well and with confidence you just have to continue practicing.Your language is a difficult one



but will become more second nature as you continue.

115 days ago



GETULLY

I grew up in a family where some at my grandparents level left the Amish with High German on Sundays and Pennsylvania Dutch (dialect of southern Germany) the rest of the time. My parents both spoke Pennsylvania Dutch but only used it at home to talk about things they did not want the kids to overhear/understand. I still have a few words but not enough to converse.
115 days ago



MYBESTME4LIFE

What a wonderful heritage!





115 days ago



ALIHIKES

Another great blog. I really appreciate the diversity of culture and languages within our borders. And of course we gain even more by traveling to foreign countries. I always try to learn a few words whenever I visit another country that speaks a different language.



It is so true that children learn languages much more easily. It is much harder for me now
116 days ago



GREYDOLPHIN

My mom's parents came to the US from Germany before World War II. They added a "t" to their name, thinking that it would sound more American. I used to stay (not willingly) at my great-aunt's farm. Her sister was also there. It was a dizzying experience trying to understand them. They alternated quickly between German and French. They were from Alsace-Lorraine, which originally was Germany, then became a part of France. As a little girl I was confused and always wondered if they were talking about me.



116 days ago



BONIFIANT

My own mom was always disappointed that her German grandfather would not teach her to speak German. His answer in very broken English was, "Ve ist American now!!!" But certainly when one is a child is the very best time to learn.



I really **GREAT!** admire your learning now.

116 days ago



LGRIF22

This is a wonderful explanation of how names, heritage, and people's genealogy changed when they immigrated to the US. At least you have an idea of where they actually came from. It makes doing genealogy difficult for some.



Your remark about your accent reminded me of a time I went to Munich, Austria during college. We stayed with a German family in a small apartment on the 5th floor. The neighbor boy spoke perfect English...but with the thickest southern accent I'd ever heard. Turned out he learned to speak English with a girlfriend from Louisiana. LOL.

One of my sons' children are in the Chinese Immersion program in their schools. They are learning to speak, write, and do history and math in Mandarin. Another child, our oldest daughter has 2 of her children in the German immersion program. I feel they will have such an advantage over any of us who just took High school and college languages.

Thank you for such an interesting blog!

116 days ago



DIANEDOESSMILES

My grandparent's were DEEPLY ashamed of being, get this,, from CANADA!! Their parents were French. Hmmm everyone bleeds the same, has the emotions of humans, and NOT A ONE OF US had a choice on where we were born. No one. Ever.



What difference does it make? I'll get to know anyone, based on their talk, actions either they are someone I'll enjoy or I choose to not become in their circle of friends. IF ONLY everyone was this way. We are all people.

116 days ago



NANANANA

As a child, I was exposed to Yiddish phrases. Only enough to understand The Jazz Singer. I studied German and the most important phrase I learned? Langsamer Bitte. [Slower please]



With our travels, I've learned 'Thank you' in many languages. Some people are eager to teach their language. One many was teaching me something in Italian. When I got it right, he said 'Brava'. I looked at him and my questioning expression turned to a smile. Then he smiled too.

116 days ago



THINCPL2004

That was a a awesome blog! Thank you so much! Its great to learn that much as a kid!



116 days ago



AZMOMXTWO

this is awesome that you were able to learn some as a child



116 days ago

BUTTERFLYJANS

What an interesting blog. Thanks for sharing your story with us.



116 days ago



AKA_TROUBLE

I have only learned Spanish (8 years in school, starting in 5th grade) and a smattering of Polish and Greek from working in restaurants of the same where the cooks spoke little English. Still, unless we are 100% American Indian, we are all descended from immigrants.

116 days ago



FRITZYS_MAMA

Very interesting information! Love to get your perspective on language and your experience.

Thanks for sharing!!

116 days ago



KNEESOCKS1945

Thank you for sharing your family with us.

116 days ago



MSMOSTIMPROVED

I loved that your husband shares your interest in language and travel. My goal is to one day master Spanish beyond the bare minimum.

116 days ago



KITTYHAWK1949

That political cartoon text sounds like something we might have heard from the previous administration. So sad.

116 days ago



JPPERSELL

You always have the best blogs about your family history. I just love them. I am so amazed that you are still going to school at seventy and plan to travel. It is truly wonderful.

116 days ago



RACHNACH



116 days ago



YELLOW09RED

Good afternoon Eileen,
Thank you for sharing your family.

I love listening to other languages being spoken. You are blessed.

Hugs and smiles,
Debbie



116 days ago



CD26438932

Interesting

116 days ago



SHAKERATTLEROLL



for the history, English and speaking of a new language but also for the language of love that you use ever so much as you talk about your family.

Do you know as much about hubby's family?

116 days ago



PATRICIAAK

very interesting

116 days ago





MARTHA324

You are amazing! Your zest to learn will keep you young.



My Dad's Mom spoke Swedish and as kids we learned a few words and some prayers. Never had a facility with languages.

116 days ago



GRAMPIAN

Fascinating story.

116 days ago

THANK YOU!



SAMMILESSACH

How fascinating! This is so incredibly interesting.

My biological parents were from PA.

I took 1 year of Spanish 2 years German. I am wanting to take Spanish again and take it seriously.

Never stop learning!

I hope you can travel soon, 2021 so far is a lot like 2020. Something has got to give right?

116 days ago



AMUSICALLIFE

What great memories! When we lived in San Antonio , we had some Korean neighbors and my oldest son was best friend with their son. Every time they would speak Korean, my one year old daughter laughed her head off. She thought it was so funny sounding. :-) they loved her reaction to their language. They were good people.

116 days ago



Comment edited on: 2/10/2021 9:58:23 AM



UPTOIT59

We are German - my grandfather joined the US Navy during WWI to prove his loyalty. It is interesting stuff, they changed the last name of our family on my mother's father's side because they didn't know how to spell it. Germans weren't very popular in either war so we blended I am told. Judge the person who is front of you I say. It is still going on today with different nationalities



but similar reactions....

116 days ago



RHOOK20047

Fascinating tracing our roots. I think we have lost touch with our roots in today's world. All anyone cares about is the here and now. I remember growing up in St. Louis, we had our ethnic neighborhoods. I have friends that were Italian and live on the "Hill". I have friends from school who were Polish and some German. I remember the different smells of the houses. Always had something baking and always smelled so good. My friends would say the opposite about our house, saying it always smelled so clean, no food smells lingering.

116 days ago



PHATPAT18

Thanks for sharing your story.

117 days ago



MSLZZY

Growing up in different times.

117 days ago



DEE797

I do enjoy reading your blogs. The way you write feels like I am there with you. Wishing you all the best!

117 days ago



DARCY-B

I enjoy your blog. Thank you for sharing!

117 days ago



PLCHAPPELL

Worthwhile studu

117 days ago





ETHELMERZ

Thought provoking themes. I was born in Berlin, right after the war. Parents and family learned all too well, what the signs and symbols of what has been going on here, for the past 4 years meant! Now cowards want to sweep it under the rug! There need to be punishments for the offenders!

117 days ago



JOE14250

Thank you for your entry. Obviously It has touched a lot of people. Our country can do much to improve. Teaching language by emersion would be a great choice in a charter type model. Start when 5 or 6.

117 days ago



SUNNYBEACHGIRL

This was a very interesting discussion and t enjoyed everyone sharing there story. My grandparents were immigrants and did not speak much English. My sisters and I were not encouraged to learn their native language and never developed a relationship with them

117 days ago



CINCINMORECIN

My grandfather immigrated from Switzerland and everyone thought he was Scottish. He never corrected them and was called "Scotty" by his co-workers until his death.

117 days ago



LIS193

Interesting family history

117 days ago



MARYJEANSL

You have such a fascinating heritage! My Swiss (they really were Swiss, lol!) and German ancestors seem much less interesting.

I too wish I had made more of an effort to learn languages when I was younger. I did study French, and remember....some of it. I live in an area where knowing Spanish would be very useful, but, alas, I never learned any.

117 days ago



DOVESEYES

Diversity can help us become one if we let it :) embracing it not pushing it away :)

117 days ago



Add Your Comment to the Blog Post

Leave encouragement, a question, or anything else relevant to this post. All blog comments must abide by SparkPeople's [Community Guidelines](#).

Subscribe to this blog

ADD AN EMOTICON

SPELL CHECK

Post Comment

Member Comments Page (87 total):

1 [2](#) [Next >](#)

Disclaimer: Weight loss results will vary from person to person. No individual result should be seen as a typical result of following the SparkPeople program.