



English: Personal Experiences

Megumi Kato Inman

Megumi Kato Inman:

My mother's Japanese and my father's English. I was born in Japan and at the, when I was nine months old I moved to the UK and lived in the UK til I was nine years old. So I was brought up bilingual, I spoke English at nursery and at primary school. But at home with my mother especially I spoke in Japanese. So when I was younger I couldn't really, my mother says that I didn't know the difference between Japanese and English and I, I knew that one, an object would have more than one name for it but I wouldn't really know what was English, what was Japanese. So if, my grandmother used to be, well my English grandmother sometimes get a little but upset because I'd start speaking to her in Japanese and she would be like, you can't do that to me you have to speak in English to me. But I wouldn't, I was too young to understand which, what, what language was what. So I was brought up in quite a mixed language environment. And I think it was when I started going to school I really understood what English was 'cos you didn't speak Japanese at school.

When I moved to Japan the most important thing for me was to assimilate, to just get to, to not stand out at all 'cos our family stood out. My father's tall, blond hair, blue eyes, you, you wouldn't have to do anything we just stood out.

So the most, the most important thing for me was to just kind of like fit in with all the other Japanese kids which meant not speaking English at all. So I hated speaking English at school.

If I had to phone my parents to say that I was going to go to a friend's house I'd make sure that I spoke so that in Japanese even though I wasn't used to speaking Japanese to my parents. One thing that I forced my siblings, my younger siblings to do was to call me big sister which is how younger, how siblings call each other. You don't really call them by their names in Japan, you call them big sister or big brother especially if they're older than you whereas my younger brother and sister would just call me Meg and I made, yeah I made sure that they changed that 'cos I didn't like the fact that, that just made us even more English and like, treated like a foreigner. We lived in Japan for five years. At the age of 14 we moved back to London and I went to school to do GCSE's. And I initially thought that this would be a lot, a much easier transition, especially because I'd lived and was brought up in London. Or I had been brought up in London. But actually I think I found it even more difficult coming back to England because things had just changed so much. I felt so Japanese but, and my English wasn't nearly as good as what it used to be. I think I also had Japan's, I had, not a naïve child, not, not. Well everyone in England was a lot more being proper teenagers if that's, if that's, you know, they were all, putting on make up, and going out clubbing and what not

whereas I was just playing tennis everyday in Japan. And I had quite a sheltered, like a real childhood in that sense, so that, so it was such a huge culture shock. And I think because I felt quite Japanese as well but I spoke like good enough English, people didn't really know where to place me. Was I English or was I the new foreign kid that was moving into school? I am so grateful that I can speak Japanese and English. Being bilingual is great, it has opened, I have met so many people from both from Japan and England but also I think the culture that you learn from a language and knowing two different, almost polar opposite cultures is, is, is a just unimaginably beneficial.