

Not speaking English in the USA

C: Hi Maria.

M: Hey Carla.

C: Hi. You know, you being American, I have always wondered how the huge variation of the cultures work in the USA.

M: I mean, it's hard to explain because we have every culture of the world is represented in the USA. And we have over 350 different languages. And people don't realize that. They think America is America and everybody's the same. And it depends on the state where you live. It depends on the culture where you come from. It depends if there's a lot of people from your culture there. Like we have Chinatown or Italian town or Greek town in some cities.

C: And that's famous, right? Like New York or

M: California

C: Other big cities will have different districts in the big cities. But yeah, then I suppose you could hear a lot of languages just in the streets.

M: Yep. Absolutely. Especially in the big cities.

C: Is that creating any problems with communications or does everyone speak English and then it works fine?

M: We have a lot of people who don't have access to English. They come as adults. They have to work full time in a job that doesn't require English. And then they go home. And so they never have chances to go to classes or anything. So we do have people who have trouble accessing some things in the United States because they don't speak English.

C: I understand. And I wonder how these people would relate to other people in yeah, the neighbors or, yeah, other people in their communities. But also, how do you get instructions what to do at work if you don't speak the language of the country?

M: So, a lot of employers are bilingual. And then in schools, what will happen, so I was a teacher for a long time, and I taught students who had immigrated here. When I had to have a parent-teacher conference, the kids translate for the parents.

C: Oh, I can imagine this going many different ways. Especially if you are having troubles. And you are allowed to translate to your own parents. It's like, hmm, I think I've actually seen some like scenes in movies where, yeah, the student translates in their own benefit and hmm.

M: Very common. And also the child has to translate it culturally for the parent. So if you're coming from a culture that's very strict in that culture thinks the teacher should take care of everything. And the teacher says, I would like you to do this at home. The child is not only translating the language, but has to interpret the culture for the parent.

C: ... kind of frame it like oh the teacher is giving me homework to ...

M: Yes exactly.

C: And that's if you're willing because if you're not willing you'll say mom the teacher would like you to do her job.

M: Exactly. And you have little kids going to doctor's appointments with parents and all sorts of things.

C: That could potentially be really sad.

M: It could, yeah.

C: But you were lucky, even with your immigrant background, your parents spoke English. So you didn't have to experience any of that. This was a really interesting conversation. Thank you so much!

M: Yes, it was! My pleasure!