the bilingual family newsletter

news and views for intercultural people

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IN THIS ISSUE

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editorial

Assimilating your family into a new culture can be an intimidating business. Almost every parent would do anything to avoid compromising their children's chances in life. Nevertheless, in the globalized economy, cross-border migration is becoming ever more common. So how do we minimise the negative impacts on our families, and maximise the positive influences of such transcultural shifts?

All of our correspondents in this issue have some experience of these issues. Whether it's Nathalie Tamigneaux's family move to Kenya, Kathryn Engel's temporary placement of her children in summer camp in France, or Suzanne Barron-Hauwert's move to the United States, all of them have something to say about the anxieties, and hopes, of parents putting their children in a brand new language environment. Similarly, Maria Luisa Retana discusses her experiences as a child, being moved from Cuba to the United States, and her later attempts to rediscover a missing aspect of her culture.

While each author's experience is profoundly different, there is probably one thing that comes out in each story – communication. By listening carefully, and communicating openly, with our children, with ourselves, and with those around us, we can strive to create transitions which are as smooth as possible. We can spot problems early on, and we can help ensure that our children have the optimal chance to thrive, and to enjoy their multilingual world.

Sami Grover

Kenya, Belgium, Iran: This Multilingual Life

Nathalie Tamigneaux

The Tamigneaux Family

Our family story started in a very conventional way, for a multicultural family in Belgium at least. This changed when we moved to Africa – first to the Ivory Coast, then Senegal, and now Kenya. We speak French, Persian, English and some Dutch, according to where we are in the world. The following will give you some idea of our different language environments:

We spend much of our summer holidays in Belgium, where the children catch up with the family, the cousins and others, and where they get to learn slang expressions from their peers.

We also regularly spend about 2 weeks with my husband's (Iranian) family in Iran.

Most of the rest of our time is spent back south in Africa, in Kenya, where Swahili (more specifically Kiswahili) and English are the 2 official languages. These are the languages that are taught in schools. There are also many other major tribal languages, including Kikuyu, Luo, Kikamba, Maasai. In primary schools, the first foreign language learned is French.

Most of our every day family life is in French and English.

Belgium has 3 official languages: Dutch, French, and a small minority speaks German. Most young Belgians also speak English, although it is not an official language. Therefore, we were already convinced that bilingualism would be a clear asset for our children in gaining and retaining a job.

As most parents with an international career, we arrived in Kenya 6 years ago with some fluency in English. This was not the case for our five-year-old son, David, or his sister Loranne, who had just turned 2. Even though there is a French school in Nairobi, we didn't put them in it. Registering for the British school was rather more straightforward. So we grasped this opportunity quite confidently (and perhaps a little innocently, I must confess). Now, six years later, our expectations have been met: our kids speak both languages fluently, and with an amazing confidence. Watching how they gradually acquired this ability has provided many insights, some of which I now wish to share with readers of the *BFN*.

Adjusting to a new job posting is always quite a daunting task. When we moved from Senegal (a French speaking country), to Kenya, we were only given one month's notice. In the early stage, we settled in a furnished place, no shipment in sight, and my husband – though overwhelmed by his new job – had enough energy left to find out that his

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Kenya, Belgium, Iran...

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Mum in Iran could finally visit us here, without the usual administrative fuss we had experienced with previous postings. She only speaks Persian, so we ended up with my mother-in-law taking care of our daughter, whose first language in Kenya therefore became Persian! By that time, David had joined a small private kindergarten where most of the children were Kenyan, or from the Indian community. There is no public kindergarten. By the age of 5, a child here has good groundings in reading and writing. While the headmaster was taking me around the school, and proudly exhibited the academic achievements of toddlers, I started to worry about how David would be able to cope, not only with adjusting to the new language, but also with his new academic routine.

At first, David only attended school in the morning, and he joined a class with children one year younger than him to catch up with the academic program. I spent a lot of time supporting him as we knew that a few months later he would have to take an assessment test to be accepted into a primary school. We had added our name to the long waiting lists of several of them. So, in this state of confusion and unsettledness, I ended up on a regular basis speaking in English to my mother-in-law, in Persian to the local butcher, and in French with the maid. Somehow I still managed to take all the roundabouts the right way, as we drive on the left hand side here!

By the time Loranne turned 3, and joined the kindergarten, she had managed to learn some English – mainly from the housemaid. We assumed that in no time she would become fluent. However, we found that the "no time" took some time! Instead of being one of the lonely non native-English speakers, she was just one among the other Kenyans and Indians. The explanation for this is to be found in the structure of families here. Many children live with their grand-parents, who still use mainly dialects. For some of these dialects, a few of our colors – for instance purple – simply do not exist. In other dialects, one counts from one to three, and then moves on to many. The children needed to learn both the concept, and the related vocabulary.

> *... for a while we thought the most obvious explanation was to relate it to the trilingual situation at home. It took us longer to realize she had dyslexia.*

Since Loranne's birth, our life had been in quite a whirlwind. By the age of 3 she had lived in Belgium, the Ivory Coast, Senegal and Kenya. Her progress at school was slower than the teacher expected, and for a while we thought the most obvious explanation was to relate it to the trilingual situation at home. It took us longer to realize she had dyslexia. This was another big challenge for us as parents working abroad. Fortunately, there was a special needs teacher working in the school who was very helpful. This was a very positive difference, compared to the Belgian system, where remediation is always done outside school.

Now, six year later, English is so familiar to us that our family conversations are sometimes a big mix. The kids speak to each other most of the time in English. I try to stick as much as I can to French with them, but on a regular basis they would answer back in English. For my husband, maintaining Persian is even harder. He spends insufficient time with them, due to his work, and he often travels abroad.

Still, we have managed so far. For maintaining French, we are fortunate to have two other French speaking families living in the same compound as us and our children play together sometimes. There is quite a large, active French speaking community in Nairobi, and we join them for social activities. We also pay regular visits to their library. Nairobi offers a lot of facilities to the large expatriate community. Also, as a family we now have a comfortable financial position and can afford some luxuries, among which is

In The News...

£5m Research Centre for Bilingualism to Open in Bangor

A major new £5m research centre for the study of bilingualism is to be created at Bangor University in Wales. According to the University, the establishment of the centre underlines Bangor's growing reputation as a centre of excellence in academic research.

Professor Merfyn Jones, Vice-Chancellor of Bangor said:

"This Centre will bring together some of the greatest experts in bilingualism from across the world in an ideal bilingual setting here in north west Wales. This investment is a real vote of confidence in Bangor by the Economic & Social Research Council, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and the Welsh Assembly Government who will provide funding for the Centre."

Professor Margaret Deuchar, of the School of Linguistics and English Language at Bangor University, will lead the Centre, along with colleagues Professor Colin Baker of the School of Education, and Professor Virginia Gathercole of the School of Psychology as Co-Directors.

Professor Deuchar said:

"This is a major development that will no doubt influence the public perception of bilingualism and the formulation of language and educational policy not only in Wales, but worldwide. Our research will be enhanced by our location in the well established Welsh–English bilingual community of North Wales, which will act as a springboard for extending our expertise to other bilingual communities."

Colin Baker, who is a member of the BFN's editorial board, and author of the best-selling *Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism*, echoed Professor Deuchar's arguments, saying that this development would help keep Wales at the cutting-edge of biligualism research, policy and practice in the future:

"This puts Wales and the University of Wales, Bangor at the forefront of international research on bilingualism.Wales is regarded as a world-wide leader in language planning and bilingual education. This Centre celebrates that leadership and will ensure that Wales will continue to innovate and enhance bilingual policy and practice both nationally and internationally."

satellite TV, through which we are able to receive two French channels. The children enjoy them, and it is definitely excellent for their French. Moreover, it keeps them in touch with some of the popular TV programs at home. Internet facilities are available – not as reliable or as fast as in Europe – but Skype enables us to hold long conversations with our families.

We are lucky to also have many Persian speaking friends around. We exchange videos and DVDs. Amazingly enough, Kiswahili and Persian have a shared history. From the 8th century Shirazis from Persia (now Iran) began to visit the East African Coast. They came to trade, convert and settle. Our knowledge of Kiwashili is less than basic, but once in a while we spot some Persian words.

David discovered another "language bridge" 3 years ago while we were visiting the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. He was 8, and realised that *street* was almost like the Dutch word *straat*, similarly *mother* was like the Dutch *moeder*, *brother* like *broeder* etc. We explained that this was due to both languages being part of the Germanic language group. He usually finds being in his own country (Belgium) and not understanding everyone frustrating, but realizing this connection was very reassuring and has given him some confidence should he have to learn Dutch more fully one day.

On the whole, for our family, adding English to the languages spoken at home has been a real asset for our expat life, as it has increased our ability and confidence in socializing with people from different cultural and language contexts.

The process of keeping up the various languages is an ongoing one. The initial challenge was to make the swift move from a French school to an English one, and to encourage and support the children in this learning process. The challenge now is completely different, namely to maintain a balance at home due to the fact that English tends to overtake French and Persian.

The list of multilingualism's benefits is endless, but I would also like to stress how demanding the process can be. It is both time- and energy-consuming, and this is something that I never realized when we made the choice. It can also affect the parent–child relationship in two different ways. Firstly: I would now recommend that parents who are in a similar situation stick to their own language at home, as this is the easiest way to keep the authority position a child needs. It is much harder to do if you keep on making mistakes while speaking a

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Notes from the OPOL Family

Our American Dream

When we moved to Chicago just under a year ago, we were thrilled to have a chance to put two of our three children into a bilingual school. The private French-curriculum *Ecole Franco-Americane de Chicago* or *EFAC* has been running for 25 years now, and its promise of simultaneous French/English teaching seemed perfect. Located inside a top-scoring public school in Chicago, it has attracted ambitious parents to move closer to the school to be in the catchment area.

EFAC children follow the normal American curriculum, and have fifteen 45-minute sessions of French a week. *EFAC* kids do an extra hour of French in the morning, beginning at 8am, and they also go to French when the Americans go for 'French as a Foreign Language' classes. They skip Sport, Art, and some other classes, and rarely go to the library.

Marc and Nina have a double identity – one hour they are in Grade 4 or 2, the next hour they are in CM1 and CE1. They must switch ways of working, from French tiny graph paper with a pencil, to an erasable pen in a ruled book. There is a lot of coming and going, with books endlessly misplaced, two sets of stationary, pencil cases and handouts for the lessons they have missed. Homework is supposed to be one hour every night but it usually takes us three.

At a recent Report Card Day I talked to all four teachers. Marc's Grade 4 teacher was concerned about Marc's horrific English spelling and grammar, and his inability to write a decent answer on a comprehension paper, although strangely he can spot mistakes in proofreading exercises and does well on multiple choice questions. His reading has greatly improved over the year and the teacher was impressed he can read in both languages now. Nina's Grade 2 teacher told me that Nina also struggled to write answers for comprehension tests, although she was excellent with verbal questions. The teacher gives lots of positive praise, and I noticed that Nina got 'smiley faces' for practically everything, even bad spelling tests.

In his French enclave, Marc's teacher was frustrated that Marc is a daydreamer and did not work as fast as he should. Marc was the only new child in a well-established class and often felt confused. The teacher's strict attitude was often frightening for a ten-year-old. Nina's French teacher has a competitive class of nine girls and reports that Nina is a good worker and tries hard. Curiously, Nina writes with a beautiful cursive script in her French books, but scrawls messily in American. When I asked Nina about this later, she said that her American teacher never asked her to write nicely, while the French teacher shouts if she doesn't write a perfectly formed word.

The majority of *EFAC* families are made up of a French mother and American father. They are part of the American community. Their kids are fluently bilingual, but prefer using English together. Conversations are full of mixing, or French words dropped into American sentences, like *'Did you see the spectacle de danse last week?'* The French mothers work hard to keep their heritage going, and most fathers speak French and support the program too. There are also several French expat families who are keen for their children to learn English, while keeping the French alive for their return to France. These families need some help in English initially, but as one *EFAC* mother said *'They give the American mixed kids a taste of real French swearwords!'*

Unfortunately we don't fit into either camp. We have no family ties to America, and are not a traditional French expat family either. Marc and Nina sensed this and feel, rightly so, that they cannot please anyone. Labeled *'Frenchie'* by the Americans and *'Anglais'* by the French, they are tired of trying to fit in. It's hard to integrate with a stable community where children have been friends since Kindergarten. We socialize with the French expat families, and Marc has one French/American friend and Nina's best friend is a French girl, who is here for two years.

But I had underestimated the importance of peer-friendships, especially at this pre-teen stage of childhood. The academic pressure that the school thrives on was too stressful for our children too. As the end of the school year approached, we agreed that the school was just not right for them.

Last month Jacques was unexpectedly made redundant. When Jacques found a new job in France the children cheered up at the thought of going back 'home'. This time we asked them what they wanted and they immediately said a 'normal French-only school'. So there will be no top school or bilingual program this time, and I have learned an important lesson – a dream school can be a nightmare when you don't fit in.

You can read more about how Suzanne and her family cope with bilingualism and bringing up their children on her blog:

http://opol-family.blogspot.com/

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Nathalie with David and Loranne

language which is not your native one. Secondly: I would recommend parents be very cautious if they want their child to master the reading and writing of another language, rather than the one taught in school. I teach David and Loranne French through the distance learning program provided by Belgium. It is a very exhausting process for the mother–child relationship. For the last year we have also had a teacher coming to our home once a week, which gives us a bit more of a break.

I will leave the last word to David. Recently, I questioned him on how he feels about our choice to add English to our family life. He mentioned an aspect that we hadn't even thought of: he sometimes finds it quite annoying the fact that he makes mistakes, both in French and in English. We were totally unaware of this dimension, assuming it was not an problem for him. However, we were reassured when he added that he would like to learn Spanish in the future. It has renewed our conviction that the multilingual path we chose for our family was the right one.

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Visual vs. Aural Learning in Multilinguals

We have two boys, aged 6 and 10, whom we have raised multilingually from birth. I am a U.S. American, my husband is from Argentina, and both children were born in Germany. We used strict OPOL with our older son up until age 3. (I spoke only English with him, my husband only Spanish, and he picked up German from friends). Shortly after the birth of our younger son, we moved to Italy for 3 years. We then began speaking German with the older child on several chosen days during the week to maintain his German, but our younger son experienced the German primarily passively, as we didn't want to diverge from our OPOL strategy in those early years. We did not try to incorporate Italian while there.

We returned to Germany for our older son to start school, and he has managed well in all three languages. Our younger son started German Kindergarten at age 4 and started school just before his 6th birthday. His German grammar and vocabulary are still rather weak (though improving), which was not what we had expected after our experience with his older brother.

Over the past year, however, as he has learned to read (in all three languages), we have come to the conclusion that he must be more of a visual learner. He has excellent reading and spelling skills, and he sight-reads piano music quite well. So we wonder if the aural language input alone was just not enough to bring him to native-speaker status in German.

Our question is this: now that our younger son is reading and writing, can we expect the holes in his German grammar to fill in more quickly? I struggle to know how I should be managing things language-wise with him at home, because it seems that by having him read more to me in German, I will help him catch up with the spoken language faster. Yet I don't want to neglect reading in English and Spanish.

Meg Valenzuela, Germany

There are differences between Meg's two sons and she is worried about the youngest son's German, but there are reasons to explain the differences:

- Firstly, there can be individual differences, children (and also adults) have important differences when learning languages or learning other things but this doesn't mean that the end result will be different;

- Secondly, the experience with German has been different for both children. The youngest probably had less exposure to German before the family moved back to Germany because exposure was limited to 'several chosen days during the week'.

It is possible to raise children in three or four languages and it sounds like Meg and her husband are doing a very good job. However, it is unlikely that multilingual children will become perfect native speakers of all of their languages. Furthermore, the contact with, and use of, different languages is not the same at different stages in life; there can be changes in language use at home and still more likely in the environment, mainly if the family moves to a different country. Some languages are used more than others and the proficiency level may change accordingly. Meg's youngest child's proficiency in German will improve now that they live in Germany. If you take a holistic approach to multilingual learning you have to take into consideration that contact with two or more languages not only involves certain deficits in language use (in comparison with native speakers) but can also result in cognitive advantages, mainly with regard to cognitive flexibility and creativity.

There are different cognitive styles and some people can be more visual while others are more aural. It is possible that Meg's youngest son is more visual than aural, and that reading and writing will help his German. Most people tend to be more visual than aural, but this does not mean that they cannot process information through the aural channel. Having more exposure to German through different channels will certainly be beneficial for him because we process information better if it is presented through different channels.

Jasone Cenoz and Ulrike Jessner

‘Artificial’ Bilingualism Through French Summer Camp

Kathryn Engel

Marit and Alexander reunited with their favourite camp counselor Laure Guirard.

I have often read the BFN looking for tips for raising multilingual children. It struck me that one advantage that most people featured in the articles have is that one, or both, parents in the family speak a different language to the culture around them, so their children have multilingual models in the home. We have a different challenge in our family. Neither my husband nor I are multilingual, yet we want to raise our children to become multilingual global citizens.

My husband studied French in University, and I studied German, typical of many Americans, but hardly enough to make us fluent. Neither of us come from well traveled families, yet one of the interests that brought us together was a passion for foreign travel. Both of us would have liked to work abroad and strengthen our language skills, but our opportunities to this point have kept us in the States. The choice for our children’s education was a careful one. In the end we chose the Lycee Francais system, primarily because they began language immersion in preschool, but also because we thought the curriculum was one of the best in the world.

As parents, the challenges of giving our children this gift of early bilingual education were daunting, given that we were not bilingual ourselves. Not only did we have to struggle to understand a curriculum and education system quite different from our own, but we also faced the greater challenge of supporting our children’s conversational French outside of the school system so they could become fully fluent. The first step was finding the ideal French babysitter, a bright and talented local university student who could play with our children in French one or more times a week.

Despite a growing comprehension of French, we soon sensed that our children needed more support. Our ideal choice would have been a full immersion in France, which would have meant arranging an entire year abroad for our family. We have yet to achieve that goal. However, we found an interim step. Since I teach at a university, I was able to arrange a summer away where I could work over the internet. My husband, unable to take a summer off, joined us at the beginning and end of our two month adventure in the south of France.

We conceived a two part plan. The first part was to rent a house where we could live like a regular French family and absorb the culture. We have done this several times before (albeit for shorter periods) and love living like the locals, shopping and cooking at home. The home did not have a garden or pool, it was a village house that put us in the middle of the life of Provence where our children would use the community gardens and pool to play with French children.

We have a different challenge in our family. Neither my husband nor I are multilingual, yet we want to raise our children to become multilingual global citizens.

The second part was a little more difficult; we set out to find a summer camp for the children to attend. First of all there was the problem of communication. In the States we call most programs that entertain kids in the summer, “camps”. I quickly found out that for the French “camp” meant literally “camping”, which was not what I was seeking at all. Conversely, I did not want them in a summer “school”, a summer program where a highly skilled teacher would teach French; this is what they were receiving at Lycee Francais. Our first task then was to communicate that I wanted my children in a fun, relaxed “day camp” program, where they would play with French children and be totally immersed in French. That eliminated many of the vacation camps oriented for tourists where there were children from many countries, especially Britain, and where English would be freely spoken.

The breakthrough finally came when the French landlords who I was working with on house rentals realised that I had American children who comprehended French sufficiently to attend a typical French program. At that point, I was put in touch with the local community leisure center camps that are run by almost every village during the month of July, and we enrolled our children immediately.

The only issue that came up was overcoming my mother’s anxiety about dropping my children into a totally foreign environment where they knew no one and were not yet speaking the language fluently. Fortunately, I had many wonderful role models to talk to, as the mothers at Lycee Francais come from many parts of the globe and have often moved their children to school environments where they either did not speak the language at all, or at least were not fluent.

Interestingly, all of the concern about my children’s well being was absolutely unnecessary. My two five-year-olds love foreign travel, are flexible, and they easily enter new situations. The day before they began camp I went to the local preschool, or *maternelle*, where the program would be run. The *directrice* (or programme leader) was professional, warm, and welcoming to my children, and the facilities were excellent. They could not wait to go to camp the next day. The *directrice* introduced them as children from the States who spoke beautiful French (not quite true yet, but a truly kind and supportive welcome) and they walked right in ready to join in the activities. They gave me a kiss and were off. I had to pull myself out of the room quickly, as it was clear they did not need me to stay.

The *directrice* was sensitive to all issues and assured me if there was a serious situation someone would communicate with them in English if necessary. She had also made a point of assigning them to an assistant who was a university student studying English, which gave me an added sense of security.

The experience for my children was extraordinary. We were in a village with a superb *maternelle*. Every day my children were eager to go to camp, and happy when I picked them up. They enjoyed the activities, really liked the other children, and quickly made new friends. In addition to pure fun, the school also took them on fascinating field trips to the beach, and the theater festival in Avignon. Their lunches were truly French. The children sat around charming round tables with china, typically had three courses, passed the bread basket around, and ate at a

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'Artificial' Bilingualism...

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When in Rome... The extensive menu at Marit and Alexander's Maternelle featuring leaisurely three course meals.

leisurely pace. My children were already adventurous eaters, but now they were trying all-new French foods too. I quickly realized that this experience went way beyond language immersion; they were in an authentic cultural immersion.

What was fascinating to us was that the children did not seem to suffer from culture shock at all. Because they had had French teachers for two years, they moved into this experience seamlessly and organically, relishing each new experience and difference. Their advancement in the language was quantum. My daughter was thinking in French all day long after two weeks, and my son even started to dream in French. Their favorite assistant from the program offered to baby-sit for us during August. So their French teaching continued with a new and beloved friend.

As mothers always do, I entered the culture in another way through my children. We would be at a café in the square and my children would run to greet and embrace their friends from school. Now, we are committed more than ever to giving them a one year immersion in French schools that will take them to the next level of language and cultural fluency.

Meanwhile, I am using their experience as an inspiration and have enrolled myself in fast-track French classes. My husband is brushing up his French too. Strangely, as I study, my German is coming back also (perhaps a BFN reader can explain that to me?) I want to help with the chldren's homework and to communicate with their school. I would like to be less of a burden to French friends in conversations. Perhaps next time I am with them in a physician's office in France, I won't have to use my dictionary.

Remembering Our Cultural Heritage

María Luisa Retana

María Luisa Retana was born in Cuba, and is the author of several English – Spanish bilingual children's books. She has worked extensively with children of all ages in scholastic and cultural events as well as in theater.

To remember is to go back to your roots, your childhood, and to find your inner self. How can this be accomplished? Most of the time, it happens spontaneously in the brain. However, with a little help of the five senses, we can also make it happen. According to experts, a person cannot recall a memory from their first 2 years of life. Most people's memory can take them back only as far as when they were 40 months old. It is also harder to remember unpleasant events in our lives than pleasant ones.

> *We both got married while attending school, and raised families while achieving the 'American Dream'. However, I knew that there was a part of me that was missing...*

Most of the time, we block or try to avoid anything or anyone that might bring unpleasant memories back. Imagine a tragic event in a person's life for example: a war, or witnessing a murder. These memories cannot easily be shared and, despite being part of the person's life, often cannot be expressed or recalled. However, they can sometimes be remembered if an outside intervention happens, by becoming an eye witness in a murder trial, for example, or through psychological treatment.

Pleasant events in our lives are much easier to remember, and therefore to share with others. The five senses play an important part in remembering. The smell of sweet bread in the grocery store, an old tune you might hear on the radio, touching a fabric or a texture, seeing children playing, or eating a familiar food can all help. If you close your eyes you can bring up a memory recorded in your brain, showing that it was really just temporarily dormant. I would like to explain how I have been remembering my cultural heritage, how I am sharing it with my readers, and how it will be passed on from my children to my grandchildren and great grandchildren.

In 1970 at the age of 14, I left Cuba with my parents and sister. We grieved as a result of this important but heart-breaking event. The first week we arrived in the US, my sister Iris and I cried ourselves to sleep. In time, we came to accept the reality of our situation and we all moved on with our lives. It was not easy for my parents. They put up a mental block, and all they did for years was talk about their homeland and how much they missed it. Iris and I adapted to the new change a little easier. We went to school, made new friends, and immersed ourselves in a new culture. As typical teenagers we kept busy by trying to fit into our new environment. TV and the music of the 1970s were our best companions in this personal change.

Iris and I graduated from La Sierra High School in Riverside, CA. I went to the University of California in Riverside, and she went to RCC (a community college with a Nursing Program.) We both got married while attending school, and raised families while achieving the 'American Dream'. However, I knew that there was a part of me that was missing, but I was not sure what it was. I knew I was content with my family and my accomplishments, but still I did not feel complete. In 1994, my husband was hired as a Spanish professor at Cochise College, Douglas, AZ and with our three children we moved to Bisbee, AZ.

A few weeks after moving to Bisbee, as I was walking downtown, a familiar smell transported me to my childhood, and to my own cultural heritage. As I was getting closer to the familiar smell, I read "Queen B Bakery", and as I entered the bakery my sense of smell became acute. A sensation of joy washed over me, but I could not tell why. Five years after the bakery incident, and after writing and publishing three bilingual children's books about wildlife of the Southwest, I became aware that I had found the piece of the puzzle, thanks to the smell of that sweet bread in the Queen B Bakery.

It happened in the summer of 1999, while at home recuperating from foot surgery. I suddenly smelled that bread again. I knew that memories from my childhood had been awakened by the smell of that sweet bread I experienced in the bakery. I also

knew that it was time to write my first multicultural story, and that it was an opportunity to share my cultural heritage. This is how *Grandma's Trunk/El Baúl de Mamaíta* was created.

The smell of a sweet bread in another bakery, the name of which I can't remember, but which was located right across from my Aunt Fara's house in my hometown of Sancti Spiritus, came to me. I was beginning to recollect my childhood memories which I would later use for sharing my rich Cuban culture with my readers. I then understood one of the reasons why we moved from California to AZ. All of a sudden all was clear to me. I was able to remember with the aide of my sense of smell. Like a tornado, memories about my Grandma came to me. Within a few minutes I was writing those memories in a format that I knew could be a children's book. How did I, in just a few minutes, recollect those memories? I just kept on smelling that sweet bread, but I knew that it was not the one from the Queen B Bakery anymore, but the one I bought with some coins my grandma gave me back in 1962.

While holding the pen to write my memories, a sensation invaded the bedroom. Within 10 minutes the story was written. While writing the story, memories of my relationship with my grandma came to me, memories which also led to the publication of two other books: *The Afternoon Snack/La Merienda*, which depicted memories of my time spent with my childhood friends, and *Tanilí*, an Afro-Cuban folktale my grandmother use to tell my sister and I. I dedicated that book to her.

In the process of recollecting those pleasant events, I also remembered that as a child I was not permitted to see or visit homes of Santeros. These are members of the most prominent religion in Cuba "Santería", a blend of Catholicism and African religions. In the story *Grandma's Trunk/El baúl de Mamaíta*, my grandma's beliefs based on Santeria are subtly portrayed. Though I didn't personally experience this, it is pleasant because it was experienced by my Grandma who had fond memories of it.

As a writer, I know that the best way I can honor my cultural heritage today is by sharing my multicultural books. I have selected excerpts of *Grandma's Trunk/El baúl de Mamaíta* to share with you. I hope it can help bring pleasant and significant memories from your childhood.

Maria Retana would love to receive readers' thoughts on this article, her writings, or your own personal experiences of your cultural heritage.

Contact details removed

An excerpt from *Grandma's Trunk/ El baúl de Mamaíta*, by Maria Retana

The day's last bell rang. Miss Anitica nodded her head and dismissed the class.

I got home just in time. She was bending over the granite washtub.

Grandma stood up, reached for her towel and slowly started to dry her hair….Then she saw me, and bending over, she kissed my forehead.

I asked her, *"Grandma give me your blessing."*

"May God bless you," she said.

The bedroom opened onto the passageway where many herbs were growing…

…then she turned to me and said, *"Under these little hair bows….are family pictures and holy cards of Santa Bárbara, La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre and San Lázaro."*

I also remember seeing a Bible in grandma's trunk….

I said, "I love you grandma. You will be in my heart always."

Praise for *Grandma's Trunk/El baúl de Mamaíta*

"In Grandma's Trunk / El Baúl de Mamaíta *author María Luisa Retana offers an encouraging, comforting, and multicultural experience for children dealing with grief and renewal."*
Margarita Terrazo

"This title is a powerful and sweet book for those who have suffered the loss of a grandparent."
Bill Smith

"Grandma's Trunk / El Baúl de Mamaíta *give the reader a tender scene about the special relationship between a child, a beloved grandmother and a treasured keepsake. After many years, the child's wish concerning the ritual is fulfilled."*
Joan Reichel

"Grief without despair ... this book is beautiful and sensitive. It shows sadness without despair, and hope and joy in the depth of love."
Samantha Brown

For more information on the importance of reading, bilingual education, multicultural issues, and to find out more about Maria's books, please visit:

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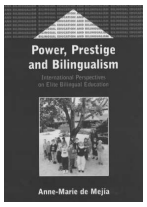

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Glossary

Language Attitudes
The beliefs and values expressed by people towards different languages in terms of favourability and unfavourability.

Language Attrition
The loss of a language within a person or a language group, gradually over time.

Language Awareness
A comprehensive term used to describe knowledge about and appreciation of the attributed of a language , the way a language works and is used in society.

Language Change
Change in a language over time. All living languages are in a process of gradual change (e.g. in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary).

Language Code
A neutral term used instead of language or speech or dialect.

Language Competence
A broad and general term, used particularly to describe an inner, mental representation of language, something latent rather than overt. Such competence usually refers to an underlying system inferred from language performance.

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