

Sergiy's Situation

The little map tracking the flight from L'viv, Ukraine to Chicago placed them close to England. Sergiy clicked out of the program, glanced out the window at the clouds, and pulled out his English-Ukrainian phrase book.

Who knew what he'd have to go through to get into a school where everyone knew English? He might be able to impress his little sister or even a few of his classmates with his puny vocabulary. The truth was, the thought of having to speak and understand English well enough to manage without help terrified him.

"Would you like something to eat?" The flight attendant asked him in English. Wow, did she think he was an American? That was cool.

"What do you have available?" He pronounced every syllable as if his life depended on it. The flight attendant smiled then listed some meals. He chose the last one because it was the only one from the list that he could remember. Hopefully it wouldn't be too bad tasting. But his mother had such a look of joy as he spoke those words. They were counting on him to help with a lot of things. Back to the phrase book.

An hour later, he returned to the flight map. They were going north, right toward Greenland. Why would they go north? Chicago was straight west. Maybe a bad storm was brewing over Canada. It would be neat to fly through some big, heavy clouds, lightening bolting across the sky and thunder loud as an explosion. Probably not many other people would enjoy that. His mother reminded him daily to think about the feelings of other people. It sure wasn't easy to do that.

When they finally landed at the airport, Sergiy could hardly keep his eyes open. It was nighttime back home in L'viv. Now they'd have to stay awake through another day. But there was plenty to keep them awake. They had to present all their papers to the people in immigration, get their baggage and go through Customs. And everywhere they went, the lines of people seemed to stretch on for a kilometer.

When they finally got through Customs and Immigration, his mother's cousin came running up to his mother and hugged her like she was made of gold. Hopefully she wouldn't do that to him.

The women separated and her mother's cousin walked to a boy standing a meter behind her. "Sergiy, here is my son, Philip. He's your age, you'll be in school together, same school, same class."

Sergiy nodded to Philip and greeted him in Ukrainian. He got only a blank stare in return so he asked Philip if he'd watched the last Chicago Bears football game. But the boy just wrinkled his forehead. What was the matter with this guy? Didn't he want to talk to him? Maybe he didn't want Sergiy to be in his class. This was going to be rough.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Philip doesn’t speak Ukrainian.”

Great, just when he thought he’d have someone to help him learn English, he ends up with an English-only Ukrainian. Philip and his mother exchanged a few words, then his mother pushed him forward. Obviously, Philip wasn’t too happy about his new relatives entering his world.

Sergiy and his family got their baggage off a big circular baggage track. Philip had been recruited to help and again, he showed no sign of wanting to do anything.

They got all their things loaded into a van then sped down broad highways. There sure was lots of traffic.

“Bet you don’t have highways in L’viv,” Philip told Sergiy, his mother interpreting.

“Yeah, we do. L’viv is pretty big.” Sergiy answered. He wished he could have answered in English. His mother’s cousin interpreted again. Where had all his English words gone? He couldn’t even remember the word for big. Well, he’d been up a long time.

Philip gave him a smirk. “Didn’t you learn English in school? You need to know it for school or you’ll flunk every subject. Mom, he’s going to have problems.”

“I study English for three years,” Sergiy answered, cutting off the interpretation.

“Well words come pretty quick in school. You better learn fast.”

“Quickly,” Philip’s mother added. “I will help you, Sergiy. My husband is a teacher at the school. He will help too. He’s Ukrainian but here much longer. You’ll be okay.”

Sergiy chewed on his lower lip for a few seconds. The English words already seemed to fly faster than the cars and trucks in the left lanes of the highway. How would he ever learn to understand English, let alone speak it? *I need a miracle, Jesus, and I need it right away.*

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The first day of school in the U.S. Sergiy dashed around groups of students gathered in the middle of hallways, jostled his way into the entrances of classrooms, and gripped the stairway railings as he climbed steps so he wouldn’t fall. Even though he had two weeks in the U.S. before he started classes, he still didn’t know enough English to understand half of what his teachers were saying.

Philip was in every one of his classes. Sergiy marveled at how quickly Philip wrote in English. After their first class, Philip offered to let him copy his notes each day. Since they were living with them, it was easy. The hard part was reading his textbooks and trying to understand everything.

Every afternoon before supper, his mother's cousin spent half an hour going over words and phrases. After supper there was another lesson with Philip's father. His brain would probably explode in a few weeks, English words flying into the air.

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March twentieth. They'd been in America five months. Sergiy read a paragraph in his science textbook and made a few notes. It was easier, much easier than the prior semester. But now he had a new problem.

The prior week, his science teacher talked about evolution as if it were all facts. When Sergiy said it had never been proven, his teacher agreed that it was only a theory. Sergiy explained that he believed God made the world. Several of the boys in his class laughed at that. The teacher told them to be quiet, then proceeded to project images of supposedly early forms of humans that looked a lot like apes.

Wasn't America supposed to be a free country? Why didn't the teacher talk about other theories or ideas?

After class, one of the boys from the group that laughed, made ape sounds. Another walked bent over, his hands close to the ground. "Hey Lance, look at me, I'm from Ukraine, I can't walk like an American. Must be because I was created."

The one who'd made the ape sounds added "That's because you're only a million years old. Maybe in another fifty thousand years your kids will walk like me."

Just what Sergiy needed, another reason for more kids to laugh at him.

At home that afternoon, Philip asked why he had to be such a dope and say stuff about creation. "Now all the guys will think I'm like you. Why did you have to come to this country anyways?"

Philip left the room and went to the room he shared with Sergiy, slamming the door. Sergiy's mother heard that and walked into the living room. She sat next to Sergiy and asked what happened. Sergiy explained a little, then said "I wish we'd never come to America."

"I think we should write a little newspaper, just for fun, and poke fun of the theory of evolution."

"What do you mean? We can't make a newspaper."

His mother grabbed Sergiy's backpack, unzipped it and pulled out one of his notebooks. She found a blank page, and drew a line down the center. In the left-hand column, she wrote "Boy finds soccer ball in basement of house. Experts think it is 5,000 years old."

Sergiy pulled a pen out of his backpack side pocket and wrote in the right-hand column "L'viv believed to have been established 10,000,000 years ago, now considered most advanced civilization in the world."

His mother smiled then turned to the next page. "McDonald's restaurant discovered in ancient ruins in China. Scientists think famous hamburger chain was started 6 million years ago. Petrified French fries found in pre-historic booth, next to 3-million-year-old toy car."

"I think we should show this to Philip who I am secretly calling Doubting Philip."

"Why don't we keep this to ourselves? From now on, when we go to church on Sundays, we will invite them too. Philip will hear and understand. For now, we can pray for him and my cousin and her husband. Okay?"

"Okay, mom. But let's hope it doesn't take 100,000 years for Philip to understand the truth."

His mother stood and stretched. "Let's go make some supper. Then tonight, you, your sister, and I will meet in my room and pray. We've got a lot of things to talk to God about and we haven't been doing that."

"Yeah, lots to pray about. And a lot to thank God for, especially for helping me learn English."

"Plus, a very good job for me doing accounting, a pretty good used car, and all the help my cousin is giving us."

"And don't forget, a pair of guinea pigs for Daryna, and many Chicago Bears. Life in America, it is good. Some of the kids, well, not good."

"But God is good, son. That's even more important. Even if some people won't help us, God will always help us."