

## **A Place to Belong**

by Marlene Perez

Everyone has a need to belong. It doesn't matter who they are, what they look like, or from where they come. Many people go through similar hard times, especially immigrants because they leave their loved ones and their native homelands. Immigrants often feel as if they don't belong in this country like farm workers that harvest our crops, or mothers who work in the sewing factories. Although they adjust over time, still many feel like foreigners.

In *Molly's Pilgrim*, Molly was not the exception. She felt she had to learn English to improve her life and to defend herself. Just like Molly, Ana from Home at Last went through the same struggle. She had to learn English to become comfortable in her new homeland, and to help her mother, who neither spoke English. Ana's mother also felt as though she did not belong here in America.

Both Ana and her mother were seeking a better life. Just as Ana's mother suffered, Molly felt unwelcomed at the beginning; but with perseverance, Molly soon adapted to her new community.

I will always look back on the day when I first met my friend, Maria. Her family emigrated from Chile; and as Molly and Ana, my friend did not speak English. She felt out of place because she wanted to make friends, but the kids would not play with her because she only spoke Spanish.

One day she came to me, and we spoke Spanish for the longest time. I told her to have a positive attitude about learning a new language. I said, "Maria, I will help you speak English." I taught her how to say, "My name is Maria." And each day Maria's English improved.

Maria's experience reminds me of myself when I did not speak English during pre-school. While playing with other children, listening to my teacher read stories, singing songs, and drawing pictures, then explaining the drawings in English, my English began to blossom like a beautiful rose.

I learned my new language during my younger years, but now I am deeply grateful that I am bilingual and bicultural. To me being able to speak two languages is very important. It is my path to a university. Speaking both languages will help me obtain a job I need and love.

I think it is important to have self-worth, and to speak our own language. No matter where we come from, we all have the need to feel like we belong someplace. Speaking our own native language can do that for us.

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