Ms. Gilbert

English 12, block 5

27th September, 2016

Common App Essay

When I was in elementary school, I was in a gang. We regularly ran from the cops, we guarded our section of the garden carefully with a watch patrol at recess, and we even had our own language. By gang, I of course mean my class - all fifteen of us; and by cops, I am referring to the endless rounds of "Cops and Robbers" we played every day at lunch. My PreK through 5 school was so small that our entire grade fit in two soccer mom's minivans on field trip days, and our community was as exclusive and irreplaceable as one can be. Perhaps this isn't a very unique experience in and of itself, but my gang had a very different quirk: Our school wasn't named after a president or a scientist, it was called "The German American School of Portland." And when I say my gang had our own language, I am of course talking about Denglish.

Growing up speaking two languages fluently, without any memories of a time when you couldn't speak either, means that young kid's brain has the tendency to forget or mix their words around between the two. This is what I call Denglish. Our Deutsch-Englisch (as we spelled those words in clumsy fountain pen at the tops of our grid paper notebooks) was as varied and incomprehensible to our parents as human language is to a dolphin: They could decipher the meanings here and there, but for the most part only we knew what the slurry sentence "Schnell weil the polizei sind almost here!" was when it was screeched across the playground at such an unnecessary pitch and speed. And our teachers knew what we meant when we would cackle
"Schau mal Niklas, he's got Kirschaugen again because er hat bei mancala ge-lost!", but it always took them a bit longer to process. And losing Denglish to only my scattered memories of my German American School experience was heartbreaking when I moved to a public middle school after graduating and completely losing touch with my old gang. I had to reinvent myself in a world where kids usually only spoke one language, and where definitely nobody spoke mine. Denglish isn't something I needed for algebra or for the intimidatingly wide hallways of a middle school that GSP would fit inside five times over, and now seven years later it definitely isn't something that fits into a resume.

If you dropped me in the middle of the playground with all fourteen of my classmates right now, I don't think a single one of us could slip back into Denglish without a struggle. But I know that if I ever run into any of them, I can smile and fondly ask them, "Errineren Sie auf unsere Fische Fred, die wir jeden Tag bei der Spielplatz bewacht?" Or maybe, "Do you remember our class fish Fred, when we guarded him every day at lunch?" And whether they respond in German or in English, I know they'll remember.

As I prepare to leave the comfort of the highschool I've come to love as much as I treasured the German American School, I know I'll be leaving another sort of Denglish behind. This time it doesn't scare me as much. As long as I know that "Alles hat ein Ende, nur die Wurst hat zwei" (all things have an end, only sausage has two), I know reinventing myself will be just like learning a new kind of Denglish.