



Chapter 3

Personal stories

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Here are some personal stories from people who regularly use Esperanto.

"I feel part of a worldwide community"

Name: Erin Piatieski

Country: United States

Profession: Mechanical engineer

Esperanto activities include:

Member of the lernu.net team



I started learning Esperanto in high school, because I'd heard that Esperanto was an easy language, and so I thought Esperanto might be my only chance to speak a foreign language fluently. I found that friends and members of my family who had taken courses in a language could hardly ever speak that language, even at a basic level. So I studied Esperanto, hoping it would be my introduction to the world of foreign languages. At the time, I never imagined what I would later be able to do with the language: I just wanted to learn a foreign language, to be able to say that I speak more than one language.

Despite this simple plan, Esperanto has become an important part of my life. I now have a boyfriend from abroad and I speak only Esperanto with him. In that sense, speaking Esperanto has become part of my daily activity – I don't just use it to talk with people in other countries, I also use it to discuss the weather, to debate recent politics, and to ask if there are enough eggs in the fridge to cook pancakes. But Esperanto has given me more than just a relationship: it has changed the way I see the world. It's often said that you can talk to people from every country in the world using English, and that's true. But not many people know that it's equally true for Esperanto. I've found that there are big differences between using English and Esperanto for international communication. I feel that using Esperanto puts people on a level footing, not only as far as language is concerned, but also from a social point of view.

Through Esperanto, I feel that I have "friends I don't know" almost everywhere in the world. When I travel, either for work or on vacation, I can almost always find a local Esperantist to meet. In a country I've never visited before, this means that after just one evening, I no longer feel like a foreigner in the new country. Using a common language, I can easily talk to other people: I don't need to worry about reading the menu at a restaurant or being sure I understand the local customs, because the local Esperantists help me with that. As a result, I feel part of a worldwide community: not as an American, but as an Esperantist.

"My main interest in Esperanto lies with its culture"

Name: Rogener Pavinski

Country: Brazil

Profession: Filmmaker and musician

Esperanto activities include:

- Musician in the rock group Supernova
- Creator of the film *Esperanto estas...*



In 2005 I took part in a competition run by TEJO (World Esperanto Youth Organization) and got financial help to travel to the International Youth Convention in Poland. I seized the opportunity and spent a month at four Esperanto events in four different countries. That was an unforgettable adventure for me, because I'd never travelled abroad before!

My main interest in Esperanto lies with its culture, and as I'd always wanted to create music in Esperanto, I started working on songs with some friends. The result was the creation of a rock group and an album called Supernova, released in 2006 by French record label Vinilkosmo. I also have professional links with Esperanto. One of the most important projects I've undertaken so far has involved collaborating internationally on the documentary *Esperanto estas...* (Esperanto is...), which I edited. I've also produced a music video for Supernova, and I continue to produce various other short films.

"Esperanto makes me feel like a true world citizen"

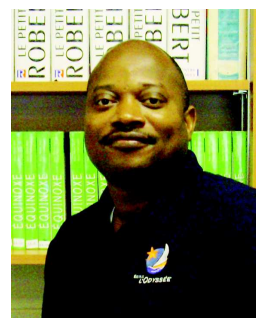
Name: Jean Codjo

Country: Canada / Benin

Profession: Teacher

Esperanto activities include:

- Member of the African Commission
- Editor of the bulletin *Esperanto in Africa*



I learned Esperanto quite by chance during a political crisis in Benin (1988). At the time, I meant to learn Spanish, but I mistook Esperanto for it. I began to have doubts when I noticed the language was too easy to be Spanish. It was only then that I discovered it was actually an international language. I started by spending a few weeks studying Esperanto on my own; I then corresponded with an Esperantist in the Netherlands to learn more.

For me, Esperanto became another language that I could use to communicate with new friends in different countries, not just with Spanish people. That's how I made friends with people from all over the globe, even those whose native languages I knew absolutely nothing about. In addition, Esperanto has had an effect on my private and professional life – the way I act, the way I think,

and the way I relate to other people, regardless of their ethnicity or culture.

Thanks to Esperanto, I went on to learn German. My very first pen pal was a German girl. Although we wrote to each other in Esperanto, I wanted to know more and more about her language. I also knew that some aspects of Esperanto grammar, especially the -n ending for objects, were similar to German. And the system of making new words by combining existing ones is similar to how German words are constructed. In the end, I decided to study German to degree level at university. Today I'm a professional language teacher, and German is one of the languages I teach. I've become more tolerant and open to other cultures. Esperanto makes me feel like a true world citizen.

"Thanks to Esperanto I've enjoyed many close friendships abroad"

Name: Satoo Reiko

Country: Japan



After the end of the Second World War, my older brother learned the Latin alphabet. While my mother was supervising his studies, she told me and him about Esperanto, which she'd learned when she was young. For some reason her words impressed me greatly and stayed in my heart for a long time. Some 42 years later, I read an article about Esperanto in a newspaper. This really interested me because I missed my mother, and it inspired me to join a course that was taking place in the town hall at the time. I plucked up the courage to go to the classroom, and I began studying Esperanto every Wednesday from May to October, except in August. As soon as the course ended, I started corresponding with a Bulgarian woman, and hugely enjoyed it. Not long afterwards, I received an unexpected letter from a Czech woman who wanted to correspond. In 1995, when I travelled to Eastern Europe with my husband, I met her and her husband in Prague. I don't have the words to express how moving this was for me. Thanks to Esperanto and its speakers, I've enjoyed many close friendships and pleasant trips abroad.

"Learning Esperanto led me to live on a different continent"

Name: Russ Williams

Country: Poland / USA

Professions: Translator and teacher

Esperanto activities include:

- Collaborator in lernu.net and other projects
- Various translation projects



In April of 2003, on the spur of the moment and along with some colleagues, I decided to learn a

constructed language, just for fun. After spending a couple of interesting days with Lojban, two of us thought: "Lojban seems like a very difficult language, and there are probably very few people who actually speak it. Maybe we should look at Esperanto. It's presumably easier and has more speakers." A quick search with Google confirmed this, and inspired me to read about Esperanto's fascinating history, culture, and literature. I realized I was finding Esperanto intriguing as more than just a language with an elegant grammar that was fun to play with. Political events in 2003 were making me think about peace, tolerance, better mutual understanding, international relations, etc. I had the gut feeling that learning Esperanto would be an important decision in my life, but I never imagined it would lead me to live on a different continent.

To cut a long story short, between 2003 and 2005 I took part in various Esperanto events around the world, got to know a very charming Polish woman, and moved to Wrocław in Poland: Anna and I are now engaged and live together, using Esperanto as our main language at home. I'm learning Polish, which is much more difficult than Esperanto, but my knowledge of Esperanto as a second language helps me learn other languages and gives me confidence in doing so. I'm really happy that my colleagues and I had that jokey conversation about constructed languages back in 2003!

"Esperanto has given me friends all over the world"

Name: Li Jianhua

Country: China

Profession: Journalist

Esperanto activities include:

Working for the magazine *El Popola Ĉinio* (*From People's China*)



I started learning Esperanto at the Communication University of China in the autumn of 2003. A year later, I worked as a volunteer and guide at the 89th World Convention in Beijing. After graduating from university, I joined the staff of *El Popola Ĉinio* in July 2005. My work often put me in touch with Esperanto speakers abroad, and those contacts have given me friends all over the world. One of my friends is Povilas Jegorovas from Lithuania, and he invited me to give a talk at the World Conference of Esperanto Journalists in Lithuania's capital, Vilnius. I was delighted: this meant I could experience my first trip abroad and make my first speech in that sort of conference. I was able to take part in the conference thanks to a grant from *El Popola Ĉinio*. There were two "firsts" for me there: it was the first time I'd spoken with foreign dignitaries (the president of the Lithuanian parliament and the mayor of Vilnius were at the banquet, and I talked to them with the help of Mr Jegorovas), and it was the first time I'd attended the making of a TV programme. I gained a lot of friends at the conference, and a deep sense of friendship. I will never forget that.

"I was captivated by Esperanto's internal logic"

Name: Zsófia Kóródy

Country: Germany / Hungary

Profession: Certified Esperanto teacher

Esperanto activities include:

- Board member of the
- International League of Esperanto Teachers
- Director of the Association of German Esperanto Teachers



I studied linguistics at university in Budapest, and started learning Esperanto simply because I wanted to see how a constructed language works and what it consists of. I was captivated by Esperanto's structure and internal logic. But I wasn't satisfied with merely analysing the language, so I went looking for speakers, to put the language to some use. A new world opened up. I got to know many people – many friends throughout the world – and with their help I explored foreign countries, cities, cultures, and customs. Later I decided to become an Esperanto teacher, dedicating my life to working to help more and more people discover this wonderful method of interpersonal communication.

I've been teaching several languages, including Esperanto, for over 30 years, in schools and various other courses. It's very interesting to compare the progress of my students, and see how much faster they start to use Esperanto. After just a short time they can hold conversations in the language and make friends in other countries easily.

Since 2003 I've been living and working in the German city of Herzberg am Harz, where my teaching has also contributed to Esperanto becoming an optional part of the school curriculum. Furthermore, Esperanto has been chosen as the language in which Herzberg communicates with its twin (sister) cities. Because Esperanto can be found in so many aspects of the city's life, in 2006 the council added a nickname: "Herzberg am Harz – the Esperanto city".

"Esperanto is part of my normal life"

Name: Renato Corsetti

Country: Italy

Profession: Professor of psycholinguistics, retired

Esperanto activities include:

- Former president of TEJO and UEA
- Member of the Academy of Esperanto



I learned Esperanto when I was fairly young, about twenty years old, because I was interested in languages. At that time, I would study Swahili or Urdu simply for the pleasure of learning other languages. I taught myself Esperanto from a textbook I found somewhere. I studied the other

languages superficially, just enough to see how they worked. But I didn't remain an Esperantist because of the language and its amazing features. I remained an Esperantist because of Esperanto's political meaning. All persons and peoples are equal, all cultures have something of value in them, and if you are looking for a truly international language, it's Esperanto.

I later added other elements to my Esperanto life, because I married an English Esperantist, and we always speak Esperanto at home. We have two sons, now grown up, who speak Esperanto as well as Italian and English. So Esperanto is part of my normal life, when we go shopping at the local supermarket or when we're cooking or having fun. I just want to emphasize that my wife and I always speak Esperanto together, even after thirty years of her learning Italian perfectly and me constantly using English for various purposes. We speak Esperanto together simply because it's what feels most natural and best for us.

"Esperanto has been my job for 7 years"

Name: Katalin Kováts

Country: Netherlands / Hungary

Profession: Teacher and website editor

Esperanto activities include:

- Founder and editor of www.edukado.net
- Highly regarded teacher and educationalist



When I was expecting my first child, I spent long months lying in hospital, but in the last few weeks I suddenly thought of Esperanto, which I'd heard about several times in my life, and I asked my husband to get me a textbook and a dictionary. The book was called "30 nap alatt eszperantóul" (Esperanto in 30 days), and I studied it intensively before my first son was born. In my incapacitated state, I really enjoyed mastering a language to a level where I could communicate successfully in just a few weeks!

I continued learning after the birth, and soon started teaching Esperanto myself, in the school where I taught maths and Russian. Later on, I sought contact with other Esperantists. That wasn't a difficult task in Hungary, where there were (and still are) plenty of trained Esperanto teachers. I became one too, and the "green language" (i.e. Esperanto) began to weave itself deep into my life – mine and that of my whole family. It gave us the opportunity to travel. I gave a crash course at an Esperanto centre in Switzerland, I taught in France, and then I held courses in dozens of European countries, one after the other. I occasionally got the chance to teach in the USA, Australia, and Africa. My children – unlike their classmates – made friends in many countries, and this significantly broadened their picture of the world and opened their minds to different cultures and languages.

"Esperanto has boosted my interest in other countries and cultures"

Name: Marcos Cramer

Country: Germany

Profession: Doctoral student in logic

Esperanto activities include:

Contributor to the Esperanto Wikipedia



I began learning Esperanto at the age of sixteen because I was interested in the grammar of a simple constructed language. As soon as I'd started, I became interested in Esperanto's ideals – internationality and equality – which were important factors for me in continuing to study. At first I learned Esperanto from a short textbook, then I used it on the Internet, and after just nine months, I took part in my first event: a week-long international Esperanto youth meeting where I was able to speak the language well.

I now use Esperanto almost every day on the Internet, where I'm in contact with people on several continents. I also often take part in international youth meetings that use Esperanto, and from time to time I use the hospitality service of Pasporta Servo for low-cost trips and for closer contact with the local population. Esperanto has really boosted my interest in other countries and cultures, as well as my interest in other languages. It was through Esperanto that I met my half-Russian wife, as well as many good friends from different countries.

"Esperanto has shown me a new way to look at the world"

Name: Trinh Hong Hanh

Country: Vietnam

Profession: Commercial office worker

Esperanto activities include:

Board member of Vietnamese Esperanto Youth Organization



One day, at my best friend's house, I met her neighbour – and she was the first person to tell me about Esperanto. Straight away, lots of questions popped into my head: "What's the Esperanto language like?", "Whose language is it?", "Is it like English?", "Is it really easy to learn?", and so on. To discover the answers to these questions for myself, I decided to learn Esperanto at the beginners' Esperanto course in Hanoi. The course was given by a competent instructor. Apart from teaching me the language, he also described Esperanto's "inner idea" and gave me the benefit of his rich practical experience of organizing events for the movement. It was he who encouraged us to volunteer to help at the second Asian Esperanto Convention in August 1999, in Hanoi.

What a surprise! In just six months of three lessons a week, we learned the language and did everything we could to make the second Asian Esperanto Convention a success. And it was so

awesome! Our entire class of beginners became the core of the Vietnamese Esperanto youth movement. Many of my classmates did more than just contribute: they took on the important responsibility of setting up new Esperanto organizations. Esperanto has shown me a new way to look at the world and brought me new understanding. My love for Esperanto and the movement has never stopped growing. I'm really pleased with my progress, and even more so with the progress of our Esperanto youth movement in Vietnam.

"You can even find Esperanto in villages with no electricity"

Name: Vladka Chvátalová

Country: Czech Republic / Belgium

Profession: Translator



I began learning Esperanto as a 13-year-old girl, using a textbook that I found at my grandmother's. At the time, Czechoslovakia was quite a closed country – you couldn't just go abroad – but I wanted to at least correspond with foreigners, preferably from exotic countries, of course. I completed an Esperanto correspondence course, then discovered there was an organized movement devoted to the language, and I quickly became a member of the Czech Esperanto Youth. That was how I started my "journey through Esperantoland". Over the years, I've met people with all kinds of cultures, ideologies, and opinions – a great example of the university of life!

When the ILEI conference was held in Benin (Africa) in 2008, it opened a whole new world for me, one that I'm now trying to getting a better understanding of. I'd like to get involved with new projects to help at least some of the people there who need help so badly. It's incredible how many brilliant, enthusiastic Esperanto speakers you can find in villages with no electricity, such as Klévé in southern Togo!

We Esperanto speakers are a relatively well-organized network of people, and we can use this to change the lives of others, in part by supporting children's education and health in poor countries. This is what I've been trying to do since 2008, in collaboration with an orphanage in the city of Lokossa in Benin, where there are also a lot of Esperantists. There's no better reward than the smile of a child who has received speedy medical treatment or a school education thanks to our help.

"Esperanto makes international relationships much easier"

Name: Kong Kil-yoon

Country: South Korea

It was purely by chance that I came into contact with Esperanto. One winter, I was watching a TV programme in which an old man was attending a course, learning Esperanto. The words "Esperanto, international language" interested me, but I quickly forgot all about them. On my first day at university, I came across the word Esperanto again, on a poster that members of the university's Esperanto club had put up to attract new students. So I took part in their course.



Once I'd mastered the grammar, I began to correspond with foreign Esperantists. To improve my abilities in Esperanto, I asked a Japanese Esperantist to correct the mistakes in my letters. She helped me reach a high standard in the language, and she also helped me understand Esperanto's "inner idea". I've now been able to make friends with hundreds of Esperantists around the world, just by using Esperanto. By corresponding and talking with these people, I've discovered what the purpose of Esperanto is. International contacts and relationships are really interesting and Esperanto makes them much easier.

"For me Esperanto is a great inspiration"

Name: Hokan Lundberg

Country: Sweden

Profession: High school teacher

Esperanto activities include:

- One of the founders of E@I and lernu.net
- Writer and coordinator of "Libera Esperanto-Libro"



I had a problem with learning foreign languages at school. I struggled with English and German for many years, but sadly I never got to a good standard. When I was 20, I suddenly felt like learning Esperanto after reading the Danish author Martinus. I had to struggle for several years with Esperanto too, but the difference was that this was a language I felt I could eventually get the hang of, and I gradually reached a high level. You could say I'm proof that someone who has no talent for learning foreign languages can learn Esperanto well. My experiences inspired me to work for the language in various ways.

For several years I was fully occupied with Esperanto projects, but now I only work on them in my spare time. My wife Sonja is also very fond of Esperanto. We met during a TEJO seminar by the Black Sea in Bulgaria, and since then we've been using Esperanto together. Sonja comes from Serbia and I'm from Sweden, so Esperanto serves as a language bridge between our different backgrounds. She speaks Serbian with our children and I speak Esperanto. They use Swedish at

nursery school and in the neighbourhood. This works very well. It's incredible to see how quickly children can switch between different languages depending on who they're talking to.

We decided that I should use Esperanto with our children for two main reasons: 1) To stop their Swedish from becoming too dominant over their Serbian, so that they don't just understand Serbian, but can also use it themselves when we visit grandparents and friends in Serbia. 2) Because my wife and I want to continue using Esperanto together, to keep it as one of our family languages. Another reason is that I really enjoy speaking Esperanto, especially with my loved ones.



After reading the three first chapters you know quite a bit about Esperanto and are ready to start to learn the basics of the language yourself! In the next section "Basic courses" you can do just that.