ESL 10098: MAN USES THE LANGUAGE OF NUMBERS TO LEARN ENGLISH

Daniel Tammet was born in London. His mother spoke English and he grew up in an English-speaking environment. Yet to his ears the English language was an alien language.

Words and sentences were a puzzle the young boy could not figure out. Daniel was an autistic savant. He was a self-confessed misfit in a world of words. He was also a mathematical genius. Daniel felt, thought, and dreamed in a private language of numbers.

Daniel remembers receiving a book on counting when he was four. Where others saw numbers, he saw images. To Daniel’s mind, each number had a shape, a color and a texture of its own. Neurologists call this condition synesthesia. For example, 89 meant ‘snow’ to Daniel, and the number six meant ‘sadness’.

Daniel explained, “When I multiply numbers together, I see two shapes. The image starts to change and evolve, and a third shape emerges.”

Daniel’s language was unique but he had no way of sharing it. The young boy felt isolated from the other children at school. He felt intimidated by their strange language.

Daniel didn’t know how to connect with other children. He said, “We spoke differently, thought differently. The other children hadn’t the faintest idea (how could they?). I didn’t dare approach them and attempt to strike up a conversation. Besides, I did not know what a conversation sounded like.”

While the other children played football, Daniel would stand and count the leaves on trees.

Friendless and frustrated Daniel hatched a plan. He would master the English language through his talent for numbers. He began reading non-stop.

Daniel made lists of words according to their shape, texture, and number. Some words such as gobble, cupboard, and cabbage were round like the number 3. Other words such as jacket, wife and quick were pointy like the number 4. And words such as kingdom, shoemaker and surrounded were shimmering to Daniel.

Daniel eventually mastered the English language. By the time he left school, he was fluent in French and German as well.

He has since written a best-selling book about his trials and tribulations.

Daniel is now creating his own language. It’s called Mänti. Its influences are the vowel and image-rich languages of northern Europe.

From struggling to learn languages, Daniel can now learn new languages in record time. He used his mastery of numbers to master languages. He is now fluent in over ten different languages.

Yet he still loves numbers. “It sounds silly, but numbers are my friends,” he said.

Numbers helped Daniel make sense of the world. But it was language which gave him the tools to share those beautiful insights.

THE DOLPHIN WITH THE INSPIRING TAIL

Life can be hard when you’re different. Just ask 7-year-old Braedon Monthony from New York. Shortly after he was born, the little boy was dealt a bad hand. He lost both of his legs due to a viral infection.

His disability hasn’t prevented Braedon from living life to the fullest. He still cycles, swims, and makes the most of every day.

Braedon’s difference is also the source of his strength and perseverance. His mother claims a dolphin called Winter inspired her son.

When Winter was only two months old her life changed forever. The marine mammal became entangled in a crab trap line. A fisherman found her stranded in Mosquito Lagoon, near Cape Canaveral, Florida.

She was cut free and transported to Clearwater Marine Aquarium. Her injuries were extensive. The line had cut off the blood supply to Winter’s tail. Most dolphins caught in crab trap lines die of their wounds. Against the odds, Winter survived. Yet despite exhaustive efforts, they could not save her tail.

Tails are the powerhouse of the dolphin. They propel the sea mammals through the water. If Winter couldn’t swim, how could she survive?

Country music singer, Jimmy Dean, once said, “I can’t change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.”

In a nutshell, that’s exactly what Winter did. She learned to adapt to her circumstances and adopt a new swim pattern.

It was a long road to recovery for Winter, but she learned to swim and eat fish on her own.

Winter now lives at the Clearwater Marine Aquarium in Florida. Many visitors to the aquarium are inspired by her plight. She is a paragon of perseverance. Hollywood even made a film about her called The Dolphin Tale.

Braedon was one of the millions who saw the film. When he first laid eyes on the remarkable dolphin, he identified deeply with her. The little boy said to his mother “She’s just like me.”

Determined to meet his hero, the double-amputee sold lemonade to fund his trip to Florida. He raised $4,000, and his dream came true on March 28th, 2016. The meeting between Winter and Braedon was an emotional one.

Seeing in the flesh how Winter had adjusted to life without her tail motivated Braedon. He vowed then and there to work harder with his own prostheses. He told his mom, “If Winter can, so can I.”

Winter’s tale has given thousands of youngsters the courage to be different. She is a shining example of how strength of spirit can conquer all.