

Overcoming Obstacles

Sweat was beading down 11-year-old Kenny's forehead. He looked to his left, then his right to see if anyone was watching. At last, the coast was clear.

Kenny unraveled the crumpled slip of paper he'd hidden under his leg. His cheat sheet. Just as he brought the paper up to his desk to have a peak at it, he glanced up. Kenny's professor was towering over him

...

He'd been caught.

This wasn't the only struggle Kenny Doan endured in his lifetime.

Kenny is an immigrant from Can Tho, Vietnam. He and his three family members moved to Michigan when he was 6; his father was already living there, attending college student at Michigan State University (MSU).

Most of Kenny's family is still in Vietnam, but he is too young to remember most of them. Kenny is an immigrant, yet it's hard to tell. He speaks English well — with only a hint of an accent — attends school, and enjoys what America has to offer.

Lately, however, the media and many Americans, including President Donald Trump, have portrayed immigrants as a negative.

Kenny has a fascinating past — one that reveals a story about overcoming challenges. But more importantly, Kenny's story shows how he and other immigrants make positive contributions to our society. His story also highlights how much value Kenny places on the opportunities that many Americans take for granted every single day.

Arriving in America

When Kenny got off the plane from Vietnam, he was greeted by his father's friend from MSU, Vu. When Kenny first stepped outside, he was overcome with fascination. Everything was huge compared to his small city of Can Tho. This was one of Kenny's first obstacles: adjusting to how much bigger, louder, and crazy everything was in America.

This wasn't Kenny's only challenge; another was the language barrier. When Kenny first came to America, he knew few English words. Kenny's father and Vu helped Kenny learn English. Plus, when Kenny started school in America, it was a lot different than back in Vietnam. Kenny's parents had ultimately moved to America to not only gain a better education for Kenny and his brother but for themselves, as well.

Kenny knew he had to do the best he could in school. School at first was a challenge for Kenny. For example, American students did not take naps like they did in Vietnam. Kenny was tired and often fell asleep in class.

Kenny recalls that day in school when he was 11. He had fallen so far behind that he cheated on a test. Kenny unraveled the hidden, crumpled slip of paper he had been hiding under his leg, and his teacher caught him. This was a setback for Kenny's confidence.

When Kenny was 15, he moved from Michigan to Portland. He felt settled in Michigan and was making friends. Moving to another state was difficult.

When Kenny started school in Portland it was still a struggle, but soon his grades started improving. Not only was Kenny getting used to his lifestyle in America, he was enjoying and trying new American things as well.

One of these was pizza. When he took his first cheesy bite, pizza instantly became his favorite food. Kenny began enjoying his new life in Portland. His grades were great. He was enjoying school and even making some new friends.

Today, Kenny understands that being an immigrant doesn't make him different. It does give him rich experiences and taught him to value a good education. But the real significance of this story is to show that moving to America is not easy. Getting into America is just the first of an immigrant's problems.

Kenny has overcome all of these challenges and has fully adapted to his new life in America. Kenny hopes to one day get a job at Nike or Intel. With his work ethic, there is nothing standing in his way.