

Deserving a pat on the back

DAN KIMBER, *Glendale News Press*
(Published: January 19, 2006)

English is a tough language to learn. I realized that years ago when I taught adult education English as a second language at the college. The rules of our language, and the many exceptions to it, make the acquisition of it a long and arduous task. The odd spellings, the multiple meanings, the mind boggling idioms, the constantly changing nature of our language. We are a conglomeration of other tongues and a tangle of rules. To many who have to learn it, that is both the beauty and the beast of English.

Just ask May Pare. She is a waitress at Shakers in Glendale. In her native country of Thailand she was an instructor of English at Chulalongkorn University. She has been in the U.S. for about 20 years, and has spent the last couple of years compiling information all about body idioms. The result is a book written by her entitled, *Body Idioms and More*.

I wanted to write about May for a couple of reasons. First of all, she is an amazing lady who has worked long and hard, and asked for nothing more from her adopted country than a fair chance to succeed. A few years ago she had a great idea and, unlike most of us, rose to the challenge of taking it beyond that stage.

In addition to this amazing person is an amazing book. Anyone who has ever taught English to non- or limited-English speakers has struggled in their approach to the task. Whether to stress structure and form over usage and style. Grammar most definitely has its place, but it is not always the best approach in teaching conversational skills to English learners.

May's book of idioms goes to the heart of our language by gathering all the expressions and sayings that involve the body (expressions like "goes to the heart"). I may, for example, "be in concordance" if I agree with you, but "seeing eye to eye" with you connects me physically as well as mentally. I may want to "instill courage and fortitude" in you, but telling you to "keep your chin up" allows me to mingle words with visual clues. It's one of the best ways that we learn.

So I want to hand it to May Pare. When I first heard about her I thought someone was pulling my leg. After learning of her project, however, I'd like to give her a pat on the back and two thumbs up for her efforts. She definitely has an ear for language and really put her finger on something. In the year or so she spent writing this book, she knuckled down, put her nose to the grindstone and jumped in with both feet.

Ultimately she learned that if you really put your mind to something and go with your gut feelings, you will find your way to success. It's a no-brainer. Non-English speakers would find an invaluable supplement in May's book as they set their sights on learning the language. For more advanced learners there is a dawning reality when it comes to learning a language -- mastering such things as body idioms is what separates a fluent speaker from one with only a passable knowledge of the language.

I have known May for only a short time, but I am thoroughly impressed with her determination. She is the epitome of what we'd all like to think our country stands for

-- unlimited opportunity, and the freedom to apply one's talents and pursue one's dreams. Some of our greatest accomplishments as a nation have come from the minds and the sweat and toil of our newest Americans.

This woman is an inspiration to us all, native and newcomer alike. I recommend her book highly for individuals looking to adapt to their new home, and for schools working to facilitate the process.

"Body Idioms and More" is in its second printing and hopefully will go through many more. Not so much because it's an interesting story of how it came to be, but more because it's an excellent tool in learning a most difficult language.

May can be reached at: Shakers in Glendale. Stop in and say hi and take a look at the book (prominently displayed by the good folks at Shakers). E-mail her at: planeart@comcast.net or go to her website at: www.bodyidioms.com.

* DAN KIMBER is a teacher in the Glendale Unified School District, where he has taught for more than 30 years. He may be reached at dkimb8@aol.com.