

*Overcome the notion that you must be regular.*

*It robs you of the chance to be extraordinary.*

Uta Hagen

In life, we get the opportunity to discover ourselves through various experiences that each person must go through. Each country has its own culture, traditions and beliefs. We carry these three through life, forming a strong, unbreakable bond with them. Not once did I think that I would be involved with other cultures. Yet that did not mean I was a close-minded person. Instead, I was still on a journey of discovering.

It all began when I had this little thought of studying abroad. I hesitated because I had never lived in another country besides my lovely home Kuwait. As I grow older, the idea of other cultures fill my thoughts. These thoughts have been altered dramatically. A year ago, before my arrival to the United States of America, most of my friends were planning to study abroad. Each of them had a different destination. Some went to Canada, others went to the United Kingdom, while the rest determined to go to the United States. I was fired up about how passionate they were towards their plans for the future. I decided to apply and study at UNC Charlotte in the United States. That moment was the beginning of my journey toward changing my worldview.

Initially, I was filled with excitement for my first international experience ever, that I forgot something important. I soon realized I would have to speak to Americans! And would have to master the English language. This was my greatest fear and worst nightmare as my English proficiency at that time was extremely inadequate to interact with Americans. Yet, I was

determined to take this challenge and give my best efforts for the sake of understanding others. Time flies, and my English has developed significantly, thanks to the English Training Language Institute (ELTI) that I am attending for improving my English skills. Also, thanks to the Americans who did not even know me and have been so patient with me and helped me much. I am grateful to both parties because my thoughts have changed which made me overcome past fears. Thus, acquiring a second language that I rarely speak in my own country is not as scary as what I once thought.

At ELTI, I have met a wide assortment of people from different countries, such as South Korea, Colombia, Saudi Arabia and Libya. Encountering these new friends helped me to understand their own communities and their own historical cultures. I have also realized the true power of language is not only for understanding what the individual wants to say. It is also for understanding what kind of culture or background he or she came from and how to interact and respect each one's beliefs. My friends, who seem more like family to me, have opened my eyes to a different view of life and how wonderful it is to be a part of various cultures, and a part of the ones that I yet to know. Furthermore, meeting friends from different cultures is a great experience that has helped me to change my mind about how other cultures interact. Many enjoy laughing just like me. Many enjoy learning about other cultures, like me. Many even enjoy video games, like me. And it doesn't stop at these things.

Most people travel to see new things, like buildings or areas, and taste new and different flavors. During my study abroad, I am more interested in the kind of clothes others wear, the type of seasonings they use in their food and a lot more. Culture is everything and it does not stop either. It is evolving every day continuously. We are not the same as 20 years ago, and we won't be the same either 20 years from now. As important as it is, it is rarely identified. Some

might overlook the cultures of people with lower income levels, different races and religions.

Culture affects us deeply and is best experienced, being there to see, sense and feel. Using all five senses to memorize every given aspect. Understanding culture is understanding “*the other*”.

Each individual’s worldview matters for the sake of perspectives given to the youth and the next generations. Not knowing about other cultures won’t help me on understanding what the world is really like. Stereotypes who do not have a clue and only run after what they hear or feel does not reflect the truth and they need to experience the world more before they judge. I have learnt not to judge by one’s view, and always give people a chance to express themselves even if it is new and uncommon. It does not give me the right to judge them because who they are. What matters are their actions and good intentions they provide. People fear different things, and they might be over protective against it. But being different is an essential need to our world in order to complete each other by guiding us to an extraordinary future. The world is extremely deep. You cannot understand it easily unless you explore it yourself.