

Ghader Hussain AL Rabaan

ELTI Student – Level 7

800777448

[galrabaa@uncc.edu](mailto:galrabaa@uncc.edu)

## Crossing Borders

“I met a lot of people in Europe. I even encountered myself”. Once I’ve read this impressive saying of James Bladwin, a well-known American novelist, it has got me recalling all of my memories and ruminating over the recent tremendous changes in my life caused by crossing the borders seven months ago to get a higher education and earn new experiences amid an international environment, and paved the way to adapt a new perspective about myself plus the world. Thus, beyond a shadow of a doubt, I can say: I encountered myself, too.

Actually, I still remember Jacqueline’s inspiring words when she interviewed me as a portion of the ELTI replacement test process. It was the first day of my Academic life in the United States and my second day in this beautiful country; therefore, my feelings were mixed about the whole new experience; I was enthusiastic but nervous, I was smiling while my hands were shaking; however, at the end of the interview, Jacqueline, one of the ELTI wonderful instructors, was able to sooth my nerves and bolster my confidence as she looked at my eyes in admiration and gently expressed her anticipation that I am going to gain an outstanding accomplishment one day. Her encouragement has continued; whenever we met, she assured her believing in me, which improved my self-esteem and motivated me to unlock my aptitudes, talents and skills. I explored my real identity: my spirit, strength, creativity and determination that enabled me to pursue the educational journey confidently and successfully.

It is often said that being surrendered by a supportive environment is an ultimate factor to overcome one’s dreads and concerns. With this in mind, I was lucky to come to the States and have a lovely instructor called Stephanie, who has really aided me in identifying my weakness and encountering my fears that may impose barriers to achieve my personal and professional goals. With her assistance, I was courageous enough to participate twice in the Cultural Ambassador Program, organized by the UNCC

International Students/Scholars Office, as a speaker to some American students, which I've never imagined that I would be able to do. In that program, I had the opportunity to introduce my culture to the students and correct their misconception regarding it. Furthermore, my participation in this writing contest is another impact of being able to confront my worries since I insisted to submit my essay although I only could write on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March. In short, I have changed from dreading such public activities to looking forward to them. My international experience provided me with a great inspiration, an inspiration that turned me into an undaunted girl who faces challenges bravely.

I was really impressed by the scene of that old man holding his backpack and delightfully walking to his classroom, the noise of this excited Chinese crowd discussing their latest test, the hopeful look of that gorgeous Hispanic cashier while offering me my Mocha Frappuccino at Starbucks, where she works to afford her college's fees, the enthusiasm of my highly qualified teacher, Debbie, who has been a fabulous engineer for twenty years and switched her career recently. Each of these amazing people taught me a lesson that it is not too late to learn, and it is not too late to change. Regardless their ages, financial and social statuses or the remote places they came from, they continued learning, dreaming, changing and switching their careers according to their passions. These people represent a significant example of how to follow our dreams, how to concentrate our efforts to achieve our aims, and how to attain an invincible ambition since when we believe in ourselves, everything is possible; the fact which I would not learn without studying overseas.

I have always believed that Americans dislike Arabs, Japanese are too rigorous, Iranians are extremely frank, and Egyptians are very curious. Yet, when I have come to the United States and socialized with plethora of races, ethnics, languages and religions, when I have interacted with people from Japan, Venezuela, America, Germany, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, China, Mongolia, India and many other countries, I have recognized that communicating with other nations well is the perfect strategy to

know, understand and acknowledge them in addition to avoiding stereotyping them. So, I have totally concurred with Aldous Huxley, a famous English writer, when he stated: "To travel is to discover that everyone is wrong about other countries". Truly, according to my observations, I have discovered that a considerable number of Americans welcome Arabs, many of my Japanese peers are outgoing, my new Iranian friend is honest but polite, and my Egyptian classmate is not curious at all. Realizing how stereotyping plays a fundamental role in preventing us to understand other cultures and integrate with them has transformed me to a more open-minded person and changed my academic path into willing to major in arts in communication to cement the bridges among different nations for creating a common ground of peace, love and respect.

After spending about 7 months in the United States, where the international experience can be tailored to the perfection, I believe St. Augustine was surely right that "The World is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page".