

## **Crossing Borders by Youngmin, Kim**

Being “international” – it is what I dreamed of, one of the goals that I want to achieve in my life. I found myself assuring this dream every time I saw the famous TV show, which deals with the experience of foreign students who came to Korea for the study abroad. With a variety of miscellaneous stories from the students, I was stimulated by the desire to have the same feeling, even though it was the cultural shock which made them surprised. While serving for Korean Air Force, I decided to make this dream come true and prepared everything that I was supposed to do for studying English in America. Since English is the most commonly spoken language which let us cross borders in terms of communication as a tool, there was no doubt for me to choose my destination. Based on my narrow perspective, my aim was nothing more than learning English as a mere language. Besides, I convinced myself not to be distracted by anything irrelevant for me, and instead, tried to concentrate what I learned during the class. In retrospect, it might have been natural for me to be discontent with and even complain about cultural topics during the class, whose value would have been underestimated by me. However, it didn't take a while to realize that I was totally misunderstanding what and how being “international” is as I faced many international experiences, which dramatically changed my view of the world around me.

At the first stage, I could understand more different cultures that I didn't know as I got closer to them. With this multi-cultural experience, I could also realize the importance of cultural diversity. My first but unforgettable moment happened when I met several Arabic friends. Being utterly unaware of Ramadan, Islamic religious fast which lasts for the entire month, I gladly offered my food to them and talked about how skipping the meal was bad for our health. They might have been offended by my negligence; however, they softly told me that they were really sorry to refuse my offer but would be glad to accept the offer after they finished the fast. I couldn't even remember how many times they said sorry to me, even though it was me who was supposed to say "sorry." Feeling a bit embarrassed, I tried to understand the true meaning of their stoic fast, and they not only explained with kindness, but also gladly shared their religious perspective with me without any coercive way. The fact that I understood an exotic culture which I had never met has profound meaning to me. Once I broke the ice, it became a piece of cake for me to get closer toward other cultures. Having met my other friends from Central and South America, I could fully enjoy so called, Latino culture, and become a part of Latino coalition, which we named for fun. Step by step, I have been ready and even more prepared to understand and enjoy the

different cultures, which is the most important virtue to be “international.” Likewise, friendship, which I define as an invisible but universal language besides English, is no more different from being ready to understand others. During the several trips of International Club and as a one of tour leaders, I saw and also confirmed that it is easy to be ready for communicating one another because we are also similar, no matter what cultural background we hold. I strongly believe that these experiences have changed my global view because of the confidence that I get to better understand others, let alone knowing how much we are blessed to have so many different cultures.

On the other hand, international experiences made me know more about my own country and culture. Since all different cultures hold their own meaning and background, and many people are ready to enjoy cultural diversity, I had a substantial amount of opportunity to explain my culture. One of the biggest opportunities was participating as a guest speaker of one Aerospace studies class for USAF cadets. Being invited to use the whole 75-minute as a guest speaker, I was supposed to explain all about my country, Korea. I was utterly surprised and disappointed with myself while searching uncountable amount of information to prepare for the presentation but not knowing how to explain using tons of material. Before that happened, I was quite confident that I

knew, of course, everything about my country. I started to figure out what is Korea and what is the best way to explain it. Furthermore, I realized the importance of sharing this cultural richness with more people by being a small representative of my country. For me, the small but efficient way was making some Korean food and offering to different friends.

It has been almost 7 months since I left home and headed to the airport on my own, feeling my heart's pounding to look down Charlotte from thousands feet above. Since I yearned for learning English as a language, I must have been too goal-oriented and neglected great chance to enrich my view of the world. Now, I know how to understand others as well as how to make others understand me. I am really satisfied with being able to get opportunity, which broadened my global perspective. With these experiences, I will not only be able to be really "international," but share this valuable experience to influence others around me to be "international."