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Economics and Philosophy

If A Picture Paints 1000 Words: How I Would Photograph My International Experience

It happened during Thanksgiving break when I was up in northern Virginia spending the holiday with my first year roommate, Anne, and her family. Anne and I had decided to go watch a movie one night, but on the way there, I realized that I didn't have enough cash with me to pay for tickets. Although we were running late and Anne had offered to pay for my ticket, I felt I should probably have some cash with me anyway so we decided to stop by a bank on the way.

While we were in the car, we talked about how full we had been after the Thanksgiving dinner we had had at her house the night before. The dinner had been a buffet with all her aunts, uncles, cousins, and their cousins. It was basically the kind of American Thanksgiving feast I had always imagined. The best part was seeing that individual nameplates with names written in cursive had been placed on the long dining table in front of every seat, and mine was there, too—right next to Anne's.

During the dinner, I couldn't help thinking how ironic it was that Thanksgiving was a holiday when most families reunited with their relatives, and I was the farthest away from my family as I could possibly get. All of Anne's relatives welcomed me and treated me just as they would any other family member; but I couldn't help thinking about my own family back home once in a while. I had never even thought about Thanksgiving when I was back at home. A Phrase like "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Valentine's Day" is common, but I had never even said "Happy Thanksgiving" to anyone before and I had never heard those words spoken to me before either.

When we got to the bank, Anne drove up to the curb and waited for me inside. I got out of the car and went in to use the ATM. I was a little frustrated that we were missing the first few minutes of the movie so I rushed inside. I punched in my PIN, withdrew \$20, and got my card and receipt. As I was about to leave, I saw an old man with a navy blue jacket walk in through the doors. He smiled at me and I smiled back. Oddly, it reminded me of back home where two strangers passing by each other on the street tend to look down, on the ground or elsewhere, to avoid eye contact. It was one of the things I loved most about being here in Virginia, you can be walking down the street

and someone you've never met before will make eye contact with you and ask how your day is going. Whenever that happens, it always makes my day just a little bit better.

All this was running through my head as I was looking at him heading out the door; and then he spoke two words to me, "Happy Thanksgiving." "Happy Thanksgiving," I replied. I walked out the door smiling to myself and got back in the car. I missed my family, but I wasn't sad at all. I felt lucky and glad that I was staying with Anne and her family for the holiday. I felt lucky and glad that I ran into that one old man at the ATM.

There are many experiences that I have had while studying here in Virginia that have had an impact on me. Singing the "Good Ole Song" at a football game while everyone has their arms around one another, dressing up for Halloween, or wearing sundresses to the Foxfield races are a few examples. However, if I were to choose the one that has had the most impact on me, it would be running into that old man at the ATM. It was only a few seconds of my life but for some reason I still remember how I felt to this day. A photograph of that old man with the warm smile would be the one photograph I would take to signify the importance of my international study experience.