

Creating Friendships Across Cultures

I stepped into the cool nighttime summer air, just getting back from a gathering of some sort. Sister Cities, was it called? I don't exactly remember, but I think it had something to do with making friends internationally. Whatever, I just need to clear my mind. I walked over to the white picket fence, opening up the gate that separates our house from the family next door. They're from Sweden, and Laura has been my friend since they moved here five years ago. I rang the doorbell, and Laura opened the door.

"It smells delicious in here." I took my shoes off and tracked the scent to the kitchen, where the traditional Swedish spread greeted me.

"Mom is just finishing the chocolate balls," Laura added, her Swedish accent making it sound like 'chokladboll'. "After that, we're eating and playing boule if you want to join."

"Sure, sounds good!"

"Good evening, Natalia!" Laura's mom, Åsa, emerged from the kitchen, carrying the tray of the chocolate goodness. "Kai! Leonarth! Middag!" She yelled up the stairs. "Are you joining us?" She turned to me and I nodded just as Kai, Laura's little brother, jumped on me.

"Natalia!"

"Hej, Kai!"

"Eat up!" Åsa called, motioning to the spread. Swedish meatballs, gravy, mashed potatoes, lingonberries, and chocolate balls. After I plated up, I stepped out into their backyard, where the boule court sat waiting for us. Next door, I could see the Brazilian family cooking one of their famous foods in our neighborhood, churrasco (barbecued ribs) and pão de queijo (bread and cheese).

Later that night, I went home and found my dad in the family room, eating a bag of potato chips.

"What is Sister Cities?" I asked him.

"Sister Cities is where a city can have a sister city somewhere else in the world where we collaborate and learn about each other's cultures. We also send delegations, share business ideas, and work together to connect people." He responded.

"There was a delegation from Åmal, Sweden, our sister city, here. They came to look at our schools and see if they wanted to change any policies."

"Oh, that makes sense." I commented. That's when it clicked. Our house is the U.S. and Laura's house is Sweden. Laura's neighbor's house is Brazil. Borders are not walls, but are white picket fences that differentiate between cultures. The gates are a bridged pathway, inviting others to learn about their culture and celebrate our differences together. Neighborhood parties are like the delegations from everywhere joining in one place, collaborating and sharing.

The friendships that we have made connect us to neighboring cultures and opportunities. We're all friends, and during our neighborhood parties, we are able to exchange and express knowledge of the countries and cultures, whether through food, stories, or the games we play. And those friendships are at the heart of growing understanding of other cultures and developing the global peace that is central to the message of Sister Cities.