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Person to Person in England

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November 15th, 2015

England is more than tea and the USA is more than my home!

For my interview on English culture I interviewed first-year student, Joanna Van Zeller, from the University of Nottingham. The date was November 13, 2015. Our teas were getting slightly cold from the long chat/interview we were having. I found Joanna, like most English people, enjoyed a nice cup of English Breakfast tea as much as I did so I provided some for the interview. Comparatively, I hardly drank tea in the United States, but here it seems more socially and culturally expected of you to drink. After asking Joanna about the importance of tea in her everyday life, she said that it is almost a staple in her daily diet to drink at least 1 cup of tea per day. In fact, English culture promotes drinking tea with daily rituals of having tea time or simply “tea” to suggest other meal names (depending on where you came from, as Joanna informed me). I suppose what surprised me most about this aspect of our interview was that the stereotype of British people drinking tea a lot and having designated, although not necessarily strictly followed, tea times was true.

I am an Oregon native, born and raised. However, I have never accustomed myself to liking much rain while other Oregonians relish it for different reasons. Joanna too dislikes the rain, or at least doesn't enjoy being rained on she said, despite being from England where it rains quite frequently just like Oregon. Joanna from an early age in her hometown of Birmingham, England was encouraged by her mother to play musical instruments such as the piano and recorder. While Joanna practiced to the lessons of her instructors, she developed a sense of rhythm for playing music, one that I do not share. Yes, though I have tried to develop musical rhythm in playing instruments such as the piano, I have tried in vain, for my playing could never quite reach the right notes that I sought. One point of difference in outlook from Joanna and myself is that she prefers to make the music

(though only for fun or hobby) whilst I prefer to listen to the music but not play it. More profoundly, I gleaned from speaking with Joanna that playing music from an early age was a widespread practice that is usually encouraged by young girls' mothers, although the same could apply to young boys and their upbringings. An interesting point from this that would be interesting to further research would be the role of gender in the development of musical skills.

Overall, my interview experience with Joanna was pleasant and informative on both herself and English culture. Joanna as an American Studies and History major seemed almost as interested in my U.S. culture as I was in hers, which significantly surprised me. Living in the U.S., I never gave much thought to my own nationality being such a point of interest for someone as to have an entire major dedicated to it. It made me feel like the U.S. was this huge, distant, yet exciting "other" that other countries such as England sought to learn more about. After all, to me the U.S. is just home. Likewise, learning about Joanna and her English culture changed my views of England as a country that was only known for The Beatles, Harry Potter, and other popular culture icons, to one that was vast in history, rich in good tea, and home to an amazing student from Birmingham and Florence Boot Hall named Joanna Van Zeller.