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Is It a Good Book?

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Is it a good book?

They say don't judge a book by its cover but that is exactly what I did. When I met my roommate: Tall, blonde, beautiful and young...I thought, 'we probably won't get along very well.' I am short, dark and older (you probably thought I'd say ugly too! 😊). To make matters worse, she went out and came in late and drunk that night. Oh, boy! "My roommate is a party girl...got drunk on the first night—a Monday!" I told my kids on the phone. Since I don't drink, I really did not want to have to deal with this, but my son kindly reminded me to let her enjoy her college life.

We stayed out of each other's way. Talked minimally, and I turned my lights off when she turned her lights off at night. When I got up earlier, I was very quiet as to not to disturb her. She watched her movies with headphones, so did I. She asked me if I'd mind it when she dried her hair. She was very thoughtful—sweet.

As the days went by, I got to know her a little bit more. I noticed she went home on Friday mornings because she had to work and came back Monday evenings. She did all her homework before going home or going to hang out with her friends. She is quite responsible. I wanted to get to know her a little better, so I decided to interview her.

I asked her about her childhood, school, family, holidays, traditions, memories... As it turns out, we have so much in common. We both grew up in a traditional Catholic households, full of love, food and yes, drinks! Extended family gatherings are important and common. Mind you, I am Latina. (I am not talking about the traditional American family). Dinner time is sacred—we all eat together. Holiday celebrations are all about sharing, the more the merrier. Disciplining is also similar for us—lovingly, or tough love when needed, including an occasional spanking.

We talked about our cultures in general. Irish and Guatemalan families tend to be

large, contrary to American families. Irish and Guatemalans are mostly catholic. In Ireland the drinking age is 18, while the United States is 21, and Guatemala's got really none. In an Irish or Guatemalan wedding, the groom's family is responsible for the cost whereas in the United States that responsibility goes to the bride's family. Irish and Guatemalan cultures are more collectivists while American culture is more individualistic.

However, education in these countries is different. The length of the school day in Ireland is about the same as in the United States, but longer than in Guatemala. In Guatemala and in the US, students learn the four core subjects and some electives. In Ireland, learning focuses on math, English and Irish. They learn very little science and history. Sports are very popular after school in all countries, whether organized or casual. Regarding postsecondary education, college in the United States is the most expensive. In Ireland, college tuition is about \$10,000, and the government pays part of it. Students must accrue points in secondary school to be eligible for college. If they don't meet the eligibility, then they can take a remedial year of learning to increase their points. In Guatemala, the public university is free, but the cost of living for those moving away for college might be too much for a family to provide.

I could fill pages with the similarities and differences of my two cultures and the Irish, but this experience is teaching me so much more than that. It reinforces my belief that even though people look different, we have so much in common, maybe even more than in the way we live, but in our values, aspirations, interactions... what truly matters in a human being goes much deeper than the physical appearance for which I initially judged my roommate. I need to remind myself of that when I catch myself judging others, otherwise I might close a door to being part of a beautiful story, an amazing learning experience, or a life-long friendship.